Ecofeminism and Kamala Das

“Feminism is the radical notion that ‘women’ (too) are human beings.” (Goodreads quote) This statement by historian and activist Cheris Kramarae of the twentieth century must have embarrassed all thinking minds. That ‘women are human beings’ is a ‘radical’ idea, is it true? ‘Women’ have always been considered less ‘human’, may sound far-fetched to some today but it is/has been very surreptitiously implied in all walks of life. Similarly, we humans are ‘part’ of nature and not ‘apart’ from it, that nature is not subservient to mankind, may also sound ‘radical’ but has always undeniably been true. Feminism refers to only the human species whereas ecofeminism is a much wider term that includes protest against subjugation of all human as well as ‘non-human’ beings. The problem is that in the past few centuries, mankind has tried to dominate ‘nature’, just as men have been dominating womankind. ‘Nature’ appeared as vulnerable to mankind as ‘woman’ to ‘man’ and therefore both ‘nature’ and ‘woman’ have been exploited and subjugated. This is the premise of ‘ecofeminism’ upon which this chapter is based. ‘Ecofeminism’ is a ‘hydra-headed’ concept aimed to bring about social change. Its earliest expositor was Simone de Beauvoir of France in 1952 who stated that for ‘patriarchy’, ‘nature’ and ‘female’ was the other. In 1974, Francoise d’Eaubonne insisted on ‘revolution’ as the means to end patriarchal domination. It is ascertained that female ‘reproductive ability’ led to its exploitation by ‘man’ that in turn led to over population of earth while an excess of ‘production’ has exploited the natural resources to their detriment. The negative societal values of ‘possession, conquest and accumulation’ further debilitated the ecological framework.
Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change that discerns interconnections among all forms of oppression: the exploitation of nature, the oppression of women, class exploitation, racism, colonialism. (Gaard on Back cover)

A poet/writer, who empathizes with all such, oppressed communities and vouches for equality for all human as well as non-human sentient beings and also finds relations between the various kinds of dominations, is an eco-feminist. Kamala Das, begins her self-introduction with ‘I am Indian’, (in a subjugated position to the West), ‘very brown’ (not fair-skinned who are considered beautiful and more privileged), ‘I wore a shirt and my/ Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short and ignored/ My womanliness.’ She was reprimanded ‘Dress in Sarees, be girl…’ (Soul…Sing 119-120) for her revolutionary behaviour. Domination begins right from Childhood; the dictates of family governed by societal expectations crush the girl’s spirit. She recalls about her father:

You chose my clothes for me
My tutors, my hobbies, my friends,
And at fifteen with my first saree you picked me a husband(Soul…Sing 148)

The young lady has no right to her opinion or decision, even concerning her own life. Doesn’t it sound like every woman’s story, leave alone the select few nowadays who can have their way. This is blatant oppression. Is womankind only meant to be subdued, her nature, her energy thwarted. The whole web of life has been put in chains. ‘Fit in, Oh, /belong, cried the categorizers.’ (120) ‘Belonging’ cannot be an imposition, but for the female everything is to be codified. Then she grows up and starts writing to be again
shunned by her adversaries: ‘Don’t write in English, they said, /English is not your mother-tongue.’ Now she speaks up through her poem ‘Why not leave /Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, /Every one of you? Why not let me speak in /Any language I like? The language I speak /Becomes mine…it voices my joys, my longings, my /Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing /Is to crows or roaring is to the lions.’ Here we find the connection of the woman with nature. In order to make her oppressors understand her desires she takes recourse to comparing her desire with that of animals and birds. She then reveals that what she speaks is ‘human speech, the speech of the mind that is /Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and /Is aware.’ An aware mind sees, hears and speaks more deeply than one who is mindlessly following societal norms. She further clarifies: ‘Not the deaf, blind speech /Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the /Incoherent mutterings of the blazing /Funeral pyre.’(119) Nature has been silenced by humans, so we cannot understand what it expresses and therefore Kamala Das terms it as ‘deaf’ and ‘blind.’

Christopher Manes says:

Attending to ecological knowledge means metaphorically relearning “the language of birds”- the passions, pains and cryptic intents of the other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence.(“Nature and Silence”, The Reader 25)

A diversity of perspectives may come under the umbrella of ‘oppositional groups’ against varieties of oppression. At the same time, this also involves an ‘ethics of care’, propounded by feminists Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, which means instilling the values of cooperation, nurturing, and love that are necessary to hold the world together. These broad categories would also include the search for ‘cultural identity’ since each separate culture
signifies particular regional characteristics which are noteworthy and important to ‘let be’ so that the multi-national unified culture doesn’t suppress or eradicate it. This ‘rootedness’ provides both freedom and ‘self-determination’ to the less privileged cultures. Eco-feminism

… includes in its analyses of women-nature connections the inextricable inter-connections among all social systems of domination, for instance, racism, classism, ageism, ethno-centrism, imperialism, colonialism, as well as sexism.(Warren 2)

Ynestra King has given some principles on the basis of which a text can be said to be following the Eco feminine ideals. King first highlights ‘Western’ civilization (in fact ‘civilizing’ of the earth in general) in opposition to the oriental, having as detrimental an effect on nature as it has on women (since they are closer to nature) being dominated by mankind/man. (qtd. in Gaard 3) ‘Ecology consciousness is traditional woman consciousness’ says Sharon Doubiago (Plant 40). Stacy Alaimo refers to ‘Nature’ as ‘undomesticated feminine space’. (Buell 110) Man took it upon himself to ‘domesticate’ nature assuming to be the master. Likewise he found the female to be more vulnerable and hence weak before his male power in order to rule over/domesticate her. So from centuries both ‘nature’ and ‘womankind’ have been at the receiving end. It is only in the latter half of the twentieth century that finding the onslaughts of nature too overwhelming together with the uprising of women’s voices that the scenario has undergone a dramatic change. People have also started working on the connection between subjugation of womankind and that of nature.
Existence has determined that the human self, comprises of both ‘rationality’ as well as ‘emotion’. Denying one or the other would be a lop-sided understanding of ‘being’. Often the ‘emotional’ aspect is considered ‘unmanly’ and ‘unbecoming’ and females are denigrated with this characteristic. ‘Love’, the primal emotion, is the basic instinct of womankind and ‘nature’ is nothing but ‘love’ personified in various forms. It is significant to note that every creature or plant, vegetation etc. prospers with care, love and attention. ‘Nature trusts femininity and bestows on it the maximum responsibility of advancing evolution towards progressive directions.’ (Nair174) ‘Nature’ is, therefore, feminine in its overall thrust. A feminist concern is necessarily an ecological concern since both the ‘domination of nature’ and ‘domination of women’ share the same ‘ideological foundation’. This is not merely an abstract concept but can be traced through the history.

During the ancient past, the early Bronze Age, the Neolithic or the Paleolithic age, the animal and plant world and also the elements of the world were respected and worshipped, they had a cognizable existence; humans were in harmony with nature and the Earth was considered as sacred. “Instead of dualism we see an integrated world view which located the divine in the physical world.” (Goodison 180) In the late Bronze Age, “the reverence for the natural world seems to wane. By the time of the ‘Geometric’ period(circa 900-700 B.C.), women were considered second-class citizens, the body was considered inferior to the divine, and ‘Earth’ had for the first time become exclusively seen as female”(Goodison 181) to be exploited by mankind. All this was primarily done in the name of ‘development’ for which ‘nature’ and womankind had to pay the price. So much so that the ‘unnatural’ became the accepted mode and resulted in ‘colonization’ of the ‘less privileged’. ‘Nature’ and ‘womankind’ have thus both suffered. As a consequence, the
black cloud of ‘ecological imbalance’ enveloped the Earth pursuing the mirage of ‘development’. One is forced to ponder here about the meaning of ‘development’. Is it the accumulation of material wealth and gadgets that we label as ‘development’? The West is highly developed in this sense but the ‘quality of life’ therein is deplorably low with diseases of the mind holding sway. Maria Mies asserts that “…the higher the GDP the lower the quality of life.” (61) Clean air and water, healthy food, free and quiet time is less available to the rich and affluent countries. Moreover, the gap between the ‘developed’ and ‘under-developed’ can never be filled, according to Ecologist Maria Mies, since the former will have moved further upward in this respect. It is often asserted that the problem has multiplied to a perilous state because of rise of ‘human population’ which far exceeds the ‘carrying capacity of the earth.’ Who is responsible for this condition? Does woman normally have the right to decide on the number of her off spring she would like to give birth to? The scenario in India has been to keep on giving births till a ‘male’ child is born. Then accordingly more resources are required to fulfil the needs of the increased population. The scenario in the West is of affluence and wastage and depletion of natural resources in the name of ‘development,’ that hinders natural processes in the misuse of ‘renewable resources’. Even Science has been playing a detrimental role as far as ecology is concerned since scientific enquiry is possible only when the symbiotic relationship within nature is disrupted with violence and power. Women too are denied sustenance and livelihood in diverting natural resources towards commodity production. So this race for ‘material development’ has been leading towards irretrievable loss of the ‘natural’, the ‘feminine’, the ‘future’, and the ‘quality of life’. It is ironic that it seems natural to exploit ‘nature’ and undermine ‘womankind’. This has established itself as ‘Anthropocentrism’
which has become the bane of human thought through the centuries. ‘Nature’ and all else, other than human, has been either taken for granted or meant to serve mankind. In other words, Humans became the masters of this whole Earth. Also, Patriarchal societies having come into vogue, the ‘androcentric attitude’ considered the ‘oppression’ of womankind as a birth right. A common denominator of ‘suppression’ or ‘domination’ emerges from the above stated blatant observations. The ‘discrimination against’ and ‘oppression of’ a particular gender, race, species or ecology became very obvious and detrimental to society at large as also of the Earth. In the latter half of the 20th century, Feminists and ecologists, therefore, came together to address such issues on a common platform called ‘Eco-Feminism’. This platform took up the cause of the ‘colonized’ group consisting of nature, woman, the dark coloured people, the poor folk, the natives, the marginalized section, animals or any other less fortunate ones due to their biology, culture or economic status. Kamala Das says in “A conversation”:

I write about the poor and disadvantaged. They are voiceless…little maidservants who are beaten up, little twelve-year-olds fetching pails of water, without even getting proper salaries… (Das, Closure 73)

An instance of such discrimination is the nude bodies of Aborigines which entombs them as less than human, since clothes are a sign of civilization and culture. A lack of concern for all such as the above becomes a major concern for Eco feminists. Society and tradition having played a negative role as far as natural eco centric living is concerned, therefore “…the ground of an ecological ethics must be ontological: it cannot be grounded in the vagaries of social constructions, public opinion, or tradition, much less in patently absurd myths.” (Buege 54) Also attributing a ‘separate’ status to humans due to their ability of
‘reasoning’ is equally detrimental to ecological awareness since it is then assumed that it is a ‘human right’ to dominate ‘nature’ due to man’s reasoning power. Domination assumes hierarchical existence, be it in ‘man and woman’ relationship or ‘human and nature’ interaction. The basic premise of ‘hierarchy’ being antithetical to ecological understanding, the relationships mentioned above lose track with subjugation as their inherent ‘tragic flaw’. So, the second principle laid down by King is: ‘Life on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy’. (qtd. in Gaard 3) According to Arne Naess, humans are not the ‘crown of creation’, but just one of the members of the ‘biotic community’. Hierarchy is a human disorientation which we unthinkingly project upon nature to its detriment. Arrogance about our misconstrued position is responsible for ecological imbalance. An eco-feminist text likewise exposes the various forms of domination. Vandana Shiva, the ecologist and Maria Mies, the Feminist assert that women, all round the world were the ones to protest against the misuse of environment. This was probably due to the ages old imbalance in the setup of society which emphasized that

…nature is subordinated to man; woman to man; consumption to production; and the local to the global, and so on. Feminists have long criticized this dichotomy, particularly the structural division of man and nature, which is seen as analogous to that of man and woman.( Introduction, Mies and Shiva5)

‘Nature’ and ‘woman’ have often been compared and substituted with each other, making their relation with ‘man’ a common concern to both. Acceptance and awareness of the non-hierarchic reality of being and that of our interconnectedness with the rest of earth, mustered with a will to change, alone can help mitigate the problem. A positive solution
here is the recognition of ‘heterarchy’ as opposed to ‘hierarchy,’ attributing equal rights to all entities, that is the recognition, appreciation and interrelation between them.

For Eco feminists, ‘difference’ does not entail hierarchical discrimination but ‘recognition’ of the other and even ‘celebration’ of the difference. ‘The other’ is to be respected and given its own space, be it from any group, in order to maintain ‘diversity’ and ‘health’ of the dishevelled Earth. Kamala Das envisions in “Daughter of the Century” that

…our city crushes its inhabitants one by one…

(afterwards) the fetor of its breath fills our mottled lungs at night. (Soul… Sings 164).

She is commenting upon the effect that city life has on its ‘inhabitants’. ‘We learn from our surroundings as animals do or birds…’ she begins the “Daughter of the Century”. We learn that we need to emulate our surroundings but what we reflect is not ‘nature’ but human development and culture that pollutes and depletes everything in nature. Therefore pollution is gradually eating up the whole environment and, in imitation, as if the younger generation is devouring its forefathers. That is what Shiva says “The destruction of organic links with the soil also leads to the destruction of organic links within society.” (Mies 111) ‘Organic links’ between diverse forms of existence are the key to ecological living. “The preservation of the earth’s diversity of life forms and of human societies’ cultures is a precondition for the maintenance of life on this planet,” say Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. (Introduction Mies 11) “Diversity’ is an important tenet of ecology which needs to be accepted on the ground level. To recognize the inter-connections between these diversities, one, also, cannot ignore the value of day to day work for survival, individual
instances, of, say victims of the ‘development process’ like women, or their outrage etc. to understand the wholeness of existence. Ecofeminism looks for these inter connections which form a living whole. Thus the so-called mundane, everyday living may also be understood as a kind of spirituality. One looks for the life-force in everything and living being, the female principle permeating throughout which helps one to perceive the sacred, the beyond of existence. It is thus that we create a science that “nurtures, rather than violates, nature’s sustainable systems.” (“Reductionism and Regeneration” Mies 34). ‘Diversity’ is thus the third key of ecofeminism whose ‘celebration’ leads to a healthy balanced ecosystem that includes human and non-human inhabitants wherein it ‘opposes all forms of domination and violence.’ (Gaard 4)

Also ‘freedom’ to women cannot be had in isolation from the rest of the natural world. Therefore there is the need of ecofeminism to be propagated. So, it is equally ecologically unethical to artificially inseminate animals to get a better breed or increased quantity of a particular species. Then there is the ‘not isolated at all’ instance of birth by Caesarean section that might have begun for emergency cases but now it is a regular business for doctors. This instance is similar to that of Vandana Shiva’s which she narrates about her decision to have a normal childbirth instead of a ‘caesarean’ section advised by the doctor. Normal child-birth, at best, assisted by a midwife at home is no longer the norm; instead the doctor’s experienced hands and brain do the job, supplementing creativity with technical intervention. Similarly, ‘in-vitro’ conception, an unnatural procedure conducting ‘fertilization’ outside the female body, fragments woman’s body into part machine managed by the doctor to cull out the desired ‘product’, the baby. Strangely, in the West specially, it is assumed that even ‘love’ for the child has to be taught and demonstrated to
the ‘mother to be’. Watching my pet dog deliver a litter of four puppies with ease and expertise and later protecting and licking them to express her love for them like any human mother does by caressing and cajoling her little ones, affirmed to me nature’s ways and teachings. However, we don’t always exude the same confidence in the human counterpart. As a result, nature and woman have been converted from living beings into ‘resources’ and ‘guinea-pigs’ to be handled by technical experts from outside. “The colonization of regenerative sources of the renewal of life is the ultimate ecological crisis: patriarchal science and technology, in the service of patriarchal capitalism, have torn apart cycles of regeneration, and forced them into linear flows of raw materials and commodities.” (“Reductionism and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science”, Vandana Shiva in Mies 33)Hybridization/ commercialized seed production results in destroying the ability of the seed to regenerate and create on its own and thereby comes under corporate control to provide an artificial environment for the required output. The farmer is also rendered useless resulting in his poverty and underdevelopment. The seed, instead of being complete in itself to follow natural biodiversity, becomes inert, simply raw material for the laboratories.

Technological solutions, being surface level interjections, are not the answer to the ecological crisis; the problem is much deeply ingrained and has to be likewise rooted out. Here, Arne Naess with his concept of ‘Deep ecology’ steps in. This Norwegian philosopher advocates a ‘total revolution in consciousness’ and recognition of our ‘ecological selves … by deepening our identification with all life forms, with the ecosystems, and with Gaia, this fabulous old planet of ours.’ (Seed 28) Here Naess, Dave Foreman and other deep ecologists place the onus of ecological imbalance on the ‘human population’ as a whole, as
an undifferentiated unit. On the other hand, Karen J. Warren, Murray Bookchin, Christine J. Cuomo and others have considered humans as beings ‘divided by the oppressions of race, sex, material means of life, culture, and the like…’(Cuomo 95) in order to delve deeper into the roots of the human predicament. Thus, Warren and others assert the need for a ‘critical analysis of human social factors’ in order to grasp the monstrosity of the problem. The impact of social factors, such as the above that create the dichotomy of the oppressed and un-oppressed, is the basis of ‘Feminism’. Such factors are primarily responsible for increase in the human population which has alarmingly reached far beyond the ‘carrying’ capacity of the earth. Thus, we see that woman is denied the freedom to decide whether to have progeny or not, or how many kids to procreate in a family, then we have cultural or religious restrictions against birth control even in the Western, so-called advanced countries etc. all such factors certainly affect global population. Every addition in the number of people increases the sustenance requirement of the earth. Therefore, ‘women’s sexual disempowerment feeds population growth, even in squalor’. (Cuomo 96) Corollaries of ‘woman disempowerment’ are sexual abuse of women, physical, mental or metaphysical. Thus, when a woman relents to physical coition due to mental compulsion or cohabits without any real ‘love’ from the other side, it feeds the ‘population growth,’ of humans, leading to ecological imbalance. ‘Social concerns’ and ‘environmental issues’ are therefore intimately connected and affect each other. Thus, White affirms:

…qualities of nurturance, intuition, and emotional sensitivity, which many believe to be more associated with the feminine principle, are the qualities most needed in healing our relationship to nature. The emergence of
environmental awareness and the equality of women show parallel development. (White 109)

Thus, it is the Feminist understanding that may perhaps be able to reveal the colonial patriarchy and domination, to envisage a holistic approach and solution to the whole issue.

…a movement that is not feminist will yield at best a superficial understanding of the domination of nature, and a feminist movement that is not environmental will yield unacceptable results regarding nature. (Davion 11)

‘Ecological Feminism’ views the world as an organism not a commodity to be used and discarded. It recognizes interdependence and mutual cooperation to be the basis of participation in the rhythm of nature. For eco-feminists, ‘existence’ is not a hierarchical happening but an interconnected web of relationships woven with life and non-life in all its diversity all of which comes in the ambit of ‘nature’. Culture would, in turn comprise of ‘basic needs’ like food, shelter and clothing as also the next-order needs such as Knowledge, Freedom, Love, dignity, identity etc. Traditions and relationships emerge from a combination of the above mentioned needs. Human needs are not to be in opposition to nature else we falter. Recognizing and respecting these interconnections is the way to ecological living and the feminist ideal. “…Search and experience of interdependence and integrity is the basis of creating a science and knowledge that nurtures, rather than violates, nature’s sustainable systems.”(Mies 34) There is no place for aggression, conquest, possession and control, be it of land or woman in an eco-centric world. Instead it becomes a celebration of existence with nature in its myriad forms. A feminist environmental text may have any one or more of the following: ‘…contextualism, inclusiveness, a place for
such non-traditional values as love and care and friendship, an emphasis on first person narrative, and a radical re-conception of what it means to be human and of interspecies relations.’ (Slicer38)

Moreover, as Bookchin says “… the domination of human by human preceded the notion of dominating nature” (qtd. in Plumwood 67) and hence woman liberation must precede the ‘liberation of nature’. This is what is evoked while going through the poems by Kamala Das, the rebel. Also, when we call a writer as ‘Feminist’, his/her concern with nature becomes obvious and necessary. The quest for love, the prime ecological yearning, is predominant in Kamala Das, a widely acclaimed revolutionary poet. ‘If love is not to be had, / I want to be dead, just dead.’ (“The Suicide” Das, Tonight…6) Love, for her, is also a search for ‘freedom and self-determination’. By ‘freedom’, she means, lack of inhibition and unhindered, unpretentious expression. That is the call of ecology.

Kamala Das uses the ‘first person narrative’, which is a characteristic of eco-feminist writings, and thus speaks for all woman kind. Her poems highlight the experience that is ‘felt’ to convey environmentally ethical conclusions. It also reveals the response of the poet to the social set up/structures. Her poems are a higher perception; they emerge when

Ultimately there comes a time
When all faces look alike
All voices sound similar
And trees and lakes and mountains
Appear to bear a common signature
…It is then that your desires cease
And a homesickness begins… (“Lines addressed to a Devadasi,” Das, *Tonight... 26*)

Here, we witness the ‘expanded self’ (Plumwood) of Kamala Das, which identifies itself with non-human entities. Hence, when there is unison with nature, desires (the root cause of all pain) exist no more. Suresh Kohli, Kamala Das’s dear friend in her last days, says in the poem “To a Daughter”:

> We haven’t even started
> To talk about boundaries
> between confinement and freedom,
> friendships and betrayals
> madness and sanity
> that tear tears apart
> from love and separation. (*Closure* 94)

The poet here has either dissolved ‘boundaries’, that thin line that may seem to exist ‘between confinement and freedom,’ ‘friendships and betrayals,’ ‘madness and sanity,’ ‘love and separation’. The one just slips into the other with automatic transition. Or else the talk about ‘boundaries’ itself creates division and ecology orientation does not encourage that so the poet lets go off them. The mind becomes undifferentiated with the cosmos thereby and ‘Yet, ‘a homesickness begins’ in order to merge with the vast unknown.

‘Love’ for Kamala Das means going beyond to being recognized as a person, of the soul within. In her poem, “The Testing of the Sirens” after making love, the man is ‘lavish’ in his admiration of her, and yet does not seem to have any love for her. She obligingly asked:
What can I do for you? I smiled.

A smile is such a detached thing, I wear

it like a flower…

We pluck flowers to adorn ourselves thereby killing the flower to enjoy its beauty for a while. Nature is often mutilated this way. Smiles are worn for ‘decoration,’ the persona replies:

Sure. Just arrange my limbs and tell

me when to smile. I

shut my eyes, but inside eye-lids, there was

no more light, no more love, or peace, only

the white, white sun burning, burning, burning…

Ah, why does love come to me like pain

Again and again and again? (Das, *Soul...Sings* 175)

The physical encounter, without any feeling of love from the other side, results in pain due to the ‘emotional rape’. ‘Arrange my limbs’ she says, since lack of love does not evoke a natural response, neither her body posture nor her ‘smile’. The ‘white sun’ is scalding her body and her eyes notice crows bickering over a piece of lizard meat/ flesh, which is her own metaphorical image. The man is interested in her ‘piece of flesh’, that is the lot of the ‘helpless woman.’ It demeans womankind. In “Composition” she gives another scathing remark:

We are all alike,

we women,

in our wrappings of hairless skin.
All skeletons are alike,
Only the souls vary… (Soul…Sings 28-29)

In other words, the bodies of women are treated similarly without any consideration of the inner soul which differentiates. ‘Woman’ is just body for the male species. Man does not appreciate the ‘difference’ in the inner woman, the soul of each individual. This sort of domination over ‘womankind’ speaks of anthropocentrism at its worst. If we extend this corollary to other creatures, they too have skeletons like humans, only their souls are different. Science and technology, cannot say anything about the inner self, the ‘soul’ of the beings. Yet, present day scientific thought makes us assume that physical reality is all that is to know. The vital question that emerges again and again in the poems of Kamala Das, is, of desiring to go beyond the body in order to have communion with the soul, ‘…by peeling off my layers/I reach closer to the soul/and/to the bone’s/supreme indifference.’(Das 30) or ‘let me sow as seed my soul in the fertile soil of his body…’ (“The Blind Walk” Das, Tonight…17) Again and again, she reiterates her desire for the recognition of the soul.

She protests against the chauvinistic attitude of the male counterpart, in fact, against oppression of any sort. Her love-hate relationship with her father is quite obvious in her poems about him. “Next to Indira Gandhi” (Soul…Sing 148) begins with her dread of her father. When she was a little girl of five, he told her that ‘dark children should only wear white’, She later questions her dead father: ‘Did I disappoint you much/With my skin as dark as yours.’ Even as father, the male figure is unable to shed his bias against womankind. A seemingly, simple statement from her father reveals his own complex about
‘skin colour’ regarding which he makes his daughter feel inferior to others. She has referred to her dark skin, time and again. In “For Cleo Pascal’, she says

I grow visible

More visible here (in Canada) than there

The inescapable visibility

Of the darker race (Soul…Sing 158)

Kamala Das is unable to overcome this complex which has been drilled into her since childhood. This colonial attitude of judging the ‘fair skin’ as superior and looking down upon the darker races has been another bane of society. Then we are told that the father had no time for her while she was growing up whereas he never missed his own engagements with social ‘charities’ etc. Kamala now painfully asks him:

Father, I ask you now without fear/Did you want

me/Did you ever want a daughter…

Now, that she has grown up and her father can no longer subdue her, she asks ‘without fear’ whether he really wanted her. This feeling must have torn the heart of the little one with no reprieve. Girls in India, particularly, have been unwanted and a dark coloured girl becomes an additional burden since it would be difficult to find a match for her and so on. Patriarchal domination is further strengthened by curbing all kinds of freedom of the young girl. She lives a choice less life that means she has no right to choose, clothes, hobbies, friends, even her husband is chosen by her father that is not a scathing satire alone but the reality of female existence. In those times and even now we hear of ‘honour killing’ etc. if the woman dares to defy parental dictates of caste or economic disparity. In this country, it seemed to be absolutely normal for the females to be handcuffed and gagged
(metaphorically) in every manner to make them follow the norms of society. Little was it realized that this was going against the natural rhythm and a strong personality like Kamala Das could not simply accept it lying down. Her ‘natural self’ was such that she wanted to ‘spread my (her) self across wide highways/Of your thoughts… but all I/Do is lurk in shadows of cul-de-sacs, /just two eyes showing…’ (“Loud Posters” in Summer…22). If this is the lot of womankind, can we expect her to be the decision maker even regarding her own body? This is the fate of ‘nature’ too, unheeded and uncared by mankind, relegated to the background and destroyed ruthlessly. Kamala’s agony, her ‘yearning’ is for identification of herself with nature, which is her ecological consciousness. Also ‘because religious, ethnic and cultural identity are always based on a patriarchy, a patriarchal image of women, or rather control over ‘our’ women, which, as we know from many examples, almost always amounts to more violence against women, more inequality for women.’ (Mies 64) She found repose only with her Grandmother, in her house. She says:

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 stranger’s doors to

Receive love, at least in small change? (Soul…Sing 150)

These lines convey that it was nearly impossible to believe, for a female to be ‘proud’ or confident and also be ‘loved’ in the family. Reminiscence and yearning for the past are tenets of Eco centeredness. When she is married, her wholesome being wanted to experience the fullness, the subtleness of love merging with the beyond, but in vain she cries out ‘Can this man with/Nimble finger-tips unleash/Nothing more alive than the/
Skin’s lazy hungers?’ (“The Freaks,” Summer... 8) What is ‘more alive than the skin’s lazy hungers’, more fulfilling? Certainly, something which unites with the whole, existence itself can satisfy her. This happens when one has a feeling of home, of relatedness to a particular place such that one can expand from there towards the rest of existence. The ‘disconnection’ among the characters is explored by the ecocritic. Das often remembers her home in Malabar with its familiar sights that endear her towards her place. She wishes to bring from her beloved, dead Grandmother’s house “…an armful of/Darkness to bring it here to lie/Behind my bedroom door like a brooding/ Dog…” that might give some solace to her “… who have(has) lost/My way and beg now at stranger’s doors to/ Receive love, at least in small change?” (“My Grandmother’s House,” Summer...13) This yearning for the lost home and grandmother is the ‘sense of place’ which is very ecological in its import. On the one hand, she has to ‘beg’ for love, on the other when she opens the door of her house; her poodle ‘rolls over in welcome… She makes / Me believe for a moment that I too have a home.’ This is human irony but very true, where humans fail to deliver ‘love’, the poodle steps in to provide the feeling of ‘home’. As it is said “many non-human animals are capable of the sort of complex awareness we so naturally attribute to humans.” (Johnson 111) Kamala Das says:

    We were earth under hot

    Sun...When he

    And I were one, we were

    neither male nor female…

    We sang, each note rising out of

    Sea, out of wind, out of earth… (“Convicts”, Das, Playhouse 25)
The relationship of ‘love’ arises from the ‘earth,’ the ‘wind’ and the ‘sea’ since in the union of the lovers all differences unite to become one. Then again when Kamala Das was to deliver her son Jaisurya, she says ‘For a while I too was earth.’ ‘Death’ and ‘birth’ both sound the ‘earth’ knell for her. We arise from the ‘earth’ and will finally merge into it, so vital it is to our existence yet we sleep over it most of the time. Then, while she is waiting to deliver:

In me the seed was silent, waiting as
A baby does, for the womb’s quiet
expulsion. This then was my destiny. (“Jaisurya” in Soul...Sing 70)

She is disturbed by the thought that for the world nothing else matters except the growing foetus “Only the treasures matter that were washed /Ashore, not the long blue tides that washed them/In.” Poignantly enough Maria Mies, while talking of the research of Kuhse and Singer, two bioethicists, recollects that “they nowhere mention that an embryo is part and parcel of a woman, that it cannot live outside its symbiosis with the woman.” (Mies 49). Understanding the symbiosis in every aspect of nature is the very basis of Ecosophy. Sundering is ‘patriarchal’ in its intent and detrimental to the well-being of this ‘earth’. Kamala Das “rejects the patriarchal value system that is based on egoism, greed for power, expansionism, hero –cult, violence, war, mindless exploitation of man and nature, the misuse of intelligence and the supremacy of reason and theory over sensitiveness and experience.”(K. Satchidanandan, Preface “Transcending the body” Soul... Sing21) In “Peripeurperal Insanity,” she is reminded of her post-delivery period of suckling her baby and the visiting doctor appears like an enemy to her, ‘Darkly dressed, with forked tails hidden/from my view’, he entered stealthily and exits silently, shaking her husband’s hand,
as if in concurrence with him while she and the baby, too, seemingly had teamed up with each other

To keep the strangers out, yes, to save

The planet that was his and mine…(Soul…sing 74)

The doctor here becomes an intruder in the well-being of their ‘planet’ which could be construed as the ‘earth’ or their own world too. Either ways, it is more akin to what Vandana Shiva has expressed in “Reductionism and Regeneration”

Not only has women’s labour and knowledge been negated, but even their intimate link with and love for the child which emerges from their own body has to be demonstrated by doctors and technicians. (Mies 27)

Subjectivity is not Das’s only domain of sensitivity. Many of her poems explicitly work on the devastating changes that modern science and technology have wrought about round the Globe. In “The Fear of the Year” (Summer…11), she notices the ‘steel hands sow/Over mellow cities…/On an earth illogically/stilled, and silenced, and dead, dead, dead.’ Her fear for the Earth, which has been ‘silenced’ and is ‘dead’, is a clarion call to all, to take heed. In “If Death is your wish”,

If death is your wish killing becomes

an easy game, and this brand new cult

spawned by an uneasy era turns

out its own dry-eyed adherents…They shall …

cleave it (Earth)

into two, or with a clap, shatter…

this accursed decade and what it holds. (Soul…Sing 131)
She is here talking about the ‘death wish’ of those who are fond of ‘killing’, such people ‘dry-eyed’ meaning thereby that they do not have any sort of feelings and hence can be very callous. The aftermath of this will be self-destruction not only of the perpetrators but also of the ‘earth’ which is torn apart. This is our predicament since we do not value the bounties given by ‘nature’.

Kamala Das vents her anger at the human race which ‘dream(s) of limbs and limousines’ but

They do not go up the trees
To reach with finger tips
A fringe of summer clouds;
They do not go down the sea
To count the mermaid’s eggs…
No, they have not
Learnt to believe
In things they do not see
Or hear. (“Sepia,” *Summar… 23*)

This is not a retrogressive, puerile outburst but an ‘agony’ for lack of contact with ‘nature’ that humanity is bogged down with. It takes an extra ordinary perception to comprehend that reality is much more than what can be seen with physical eyes or heard with ears. Das laments that we do not have any communication with the vast beyond, our vision is limited and so is our thought. Her statement of scorn says it all ‘Are they the distinguished /human race?’
In “The Anamalai Hills”, she equates her ‘lonely self’ to that of Anamalai Mountain. She is unable to find any comfort in ‘human speech’, but ‘I hear the mountain speak: I was alone, I am alone, I will be alone...’ Duerr says “people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them.” (qtd. in The Reader, Manes 16)

… The mountain

Seems deaf-mute, but the flesh of her spirit is but its flesh,

And, her silence, despite the tumult in her blood, its
destined hush. (Soul...Sing 58)

It is noteworthy that the poet uses ‘her’ for the mountain signifying the feminine nature that is related to her own. Kamala Das feels that she has to be ‘deaf’ and ‘mute’ like the mountain, in spite of all the loneliness, the turmoil inside. The mist clings to the mountain but it is not a part of it. Similarly, human relations too remain bereft of meaning. If mankind is able to hear nature speak, it will not only treat it in a better way but also womankind will be given their due.

The stark naked truth of the subjugation faced by the woman leading to her extinction in “The Sunshine Cat” sends shivers through the spine. Her trauma resulting from lack of love she became a thing to be ‘used’ by men, and

…they said, each of

Them, I do not love, but I can be kind to you…(Soul...Sing 67)

No ‘love’, only ‘kindness’ can be expected of these men. How demeaning this is for the woman. Whereas the husband is a coward, merely a ‘ruthless watcher’, locking her up every morning with books and ‘a streak of sunshine lying near the door, like/A yellow cat’, which became ‘hair-thin’ and the woman ‘half-dead’ as ‘winter’ drew close and ‘now of no
use at all to men’. Neither the spirit of the woman nor ‘sunshine’ (some sort of hope) could be subjugated for long. She is ‘locked up’ like we lock up animals as pets or nature as terrace gardens, which is equally un-ecological. There are so many barriers, restrictions for women that when the ‘winter’ of their excess crosses the barrier, it crushes the spirit of the woman and she is as good as dead. Womankind has been colonized by man as the lord and master; her will is inconsequential and existence meaningless, driven like blind cattle. Men “…rob women and nature of their subjectiveness, that is, of their own dignity, their spirituality, and turn them into lifeless, controllable matter.” (Mies 45) This amounts to ‘psychological rape’ which results in the extinction of the victim. Similar emotions are evoked even more obviously in another poem of hers, namely ‘An Introduction’, when she says:

He did not beat me

But my sad woman body felt so beaten. (Summer…62-63)

Violence is rampant in the treatment of both woman and nature. ‘Body’ is nature and what feels beaten is the woman’s spirit being inflicted with pain covertly on the body. Humans may not consciously harm nature, using plastic bags, cars, air conditioners etc. for their own comfort, but are responsible for the ecological violence / harm all this is causing. The same sequence of aggression, conquest, possession and control is followed in treatment of nature as well as womankind. Animals are part of nature, different from humans but having an equal right to respectful existence as mankind. As Das points to her own old age and then refers to the treatment meted out to an old horse in “The Cart Horse”:

Of late my words have worn

Thin, my speech resembles
The jagged gallop of
A cart horse that needs to
Be reshod and perhaps
Given rest, for, poor thing,
Its roads were arduous
And its burden always
Too heavy… (Soul...Sing 172)

The cart horse, ‘if lucky, dies on the road’ else is ‘shot dead’ because it cannot be tolerated. This is the treatment meted out to non-human species. Kamala Das likens her speech to the noise made by an old horse that needs to be put to rest, since her body is of ‘no use’ in old age. The human elders, who’ve toiled hard in their youth but are now physically incapacitated, cannot be ‘put to rest’ (exterminated) because of legal and other complications but are treated ill-humanely many a times. This concern comes in the ambit of ‘Ecofeminism’ since ‘animals’ too are ‘colonized’ by man just as the elderly. Moreover, Vandana Shiva says: ‘…the essence of being human has to be seen in our capacity to recognize, respect and protect the right to life of all the world’s multifarious species.’ (Mies 88)

Kamala Das feels ‘Cocooned now in song and yet/unsafe, for in every little pause/my ears must lose their peace…’ (‘Kumar Gandharva’, Soul...Sing 135). ‘I Shall Some Day’ (Playhouse 48) is Das’ dream wish or in fact every woman’s who wishes to break away from the ‘cocoon’ built around her but knows that she would have to return to the same ‘nest of familiar scorn’. This is the predicament of womankind desiring to merge with the vast beyond, existence itself, but knows that she is helpless and bound to come
back to the same ‘nest’ where she would be scorned at as usual, back to the draining drudgery of life. She, however, advocates ‘courage’ to let the blood flow silently out of wounds, else ‘Tomorrow they may bind me with chains stronger than /Those of my cowardice…’

However, the spirit of Madhavikutty or Suraiya (both are different names of Kamala Das) is remarkable.

… for inside this ageing body, inside
This ashen fatigue my blood is a bouncing fountain, ageless,
Red and warm, I shall yet go meet the young sun, forget
The deeply moaning sea, the bitter Westerlies,
The desert in my soul. (“The Westerlies,” Tonight...34)

Her hope does not wane, it keeps her spirit going. We find a positive note here when she decides to forget the ‘moaning’ and the ‘desert’ in her soul. Just like the ecocritics she hopes for her energy to fructify.

“Afterwards” is her reminiscence of the times when she was younger, her ecocentric yearning. Talking of ‘love, music, science and beauty’ simultaneously was normal during those days. Lovers were mesmerized with simple natural sights,

And it was normal for a girl to sigh
Over a dying bird: we learnt kindness as we learnt books, yes.
There was no sign of what was
Coming then, the earth was
Sagging heavy, fruits were sweet
And ripe… (Summer…57)
‘Kindness’, an ecological attribute, was imbibed in a natural way and no one had any idea of the impending catastrophe. There was no idea of the changes that would come in society. She remembers her days as a little girl when she would watch ‘My brothers squat beside a hedge/And slowly blind a beetle…my tears I tried to hide.’ (57) Cruelty has been the trait of the male human from a considerable time. She goes on to tell her son:

The earth we nearly killed is yours

Now…/Learn to do without love,…

You, son, walking in loneliness…

…Looking/ For the key your fathers lost.(58-60)

Das here outlines her past when the seeds of destruction of the earth were sown and gradually ‘love’ too started attenuating from this earth. She then comments on her son’s search ‘For the key your fathers lost.’ The plural tense of ‘father’ signifies the whole generation of people who have lost their bearings on this earth. Kamala Das noticed the world changing during her lifetime itself, concern for other living beings was no longer visible. She laments that her son and his likes were untouched by nature and hence ‘too dry for growth… / With no memory to kindle sadness/ In your (his) eyes, no dream of feminine smiles…From us to you was a gigantic leap.’ (58) In finding that even the ‘small leaves of The Katurmuringa/Stopped their joyous tremor…/No birdsong in the trees/Only the stomp of boots…ordered to hate’. (Soul …Sing 73)  This is the effect of the, so called, civilized human beings who fight wars to establish their supremacy over those ‘Who knew not their ethnic inferiority? Did the Tamils smell so different…’ (73) Here is recognition of a form of domination of a particular ethos which is against the rubric of ecofeminism. Sensitivity towards nature has always been a feminine attribute which is very important to be on this
earth. The leap from ‘feminity’ as the accepted mode of living to androcentrism leads to the devaluing of nature as well. This leap was made due to the severing of the connection with Mother Nature.

…man/woman, humans/animals, and white/nonwhite, ecofeminist theory asserts that human identity is shaped by more fluid relationships and by an acknowledgement of both connection and difference. (Gaard Back cover)

The uprooting from her environment, from the spot of earth which one feels is/was ‘home’ becomes therefore heart rending. Thus, Kamala reminiscences in “A Hot Noon in Malabar”:

…To

Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet

Stirring up the dust, this hot noon, at my

Home in Malabar, and I so far away… (Summer…49)

She misses her ‘home’, her place and feels unrelated to the present ‘place’ that she is in. Without the relation with this place, her relations with her spouse or the male figures in her poetry also go awry. Patriarchal society expects the woman to move from her place, her home after marriage whereas the attachment to ‘place’ is more pronounced in womankind than the men generally.

Das is a votary for people centeredness rather than seeing things as a male prerogative and female duty. It is high time that we stop treating this earth as a ‘chess board,’ moving people as also other living and non-living beings as ‘pawns’. Since, we humans often tend to forget that “The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth.” (Seattle 71)

Man did not weave this world; he is just a ‘strand’ of it. So, when he hurts the web, he is
only destroying himself. She relates that her son sleepwalks through life with a hard shell of ‘aloneness’. (*Summer…* 59) The ‘sun’ and the ‘rain’ have come out again to make us forget the ‘blood’ of the ‘earth’ that has been shed so one can be ‘happy’, in fact ‘you have to be happy’ and ‘learn to live without the love of the earth’. (58) This is not a singular instance but has become a malaise in society which is the result of apathy to one’s moorings towards nature. It is significant to note that when Das talks about her childhood, she says ‘From every living moment I wrung…that was how I grew’, that is she lived ‘life’ in its true sense by wringing out the juice of every moment in being one with nature, feeling its sadness and joy, the restlessness and wonder, whereas to her son, the next generation, she questions ‘what are you, with vacuum in your mind/ Too dry for growth’. (58) The energy, ‘the dream of feminine smiles’ was no longer there. This is what happens when the link with the cosmos, the ecology is severed. She remembers an “Evening at the old Nalapat house” where her dear dead grandmother ‘walks’. She finds

Old trees all cut down and sold, thick roots like

Truncated necks wrapped in the lichen of

A dozen monsoons, and sighs… (*Soul…Sing* 183)

This is the present scenario; the wealth of nature is being vandalized without any concern. The remaining bases of the trunk seem to be like ‘truncated necks’, which is nothing short of murdering ‘nature’. In “The Palmyra Tree” she questions:

What made

The new rich buyer of

my land cut down that

ancient tree? What pittance
could he have earned
from its carcass?(Das, Closure 15)

Human selfishness has no limits; cutting down ancient trees does not elicit even a pang of guilt or pain. As the Earth was being destroyed by mankind, Kamala became young, and found only tears, no peace, no freedom. ‘Growth’ had become a “definiteness” which is ridiculous since the very word ‘growth’ implies ‘flux’ but we have fixed notions about ‘growth’, a set education pattern, a fat pay package and as Ezekiel would say satirically: “A bit of land, a woman and a child or two…Is all the creed a man of God requires,” which implies stagnation and retardation. But in ‘Composition’ she says: “The tragedy of life/ is not death but growth…” (Soul…Sing 26) ‘Growth’ becomes a tragedy because the kind of growth that Das envisions is unacceptable in a routine set up. That is certainly ironic and later Kamala Das gets “A man who let me (her) take his name/To make me feel I belonged”. Woman herself has no identity and it is so naturally accepted in society, except by a few like Das. Yet again in the seven line poem ‘The Maggots’, Krishna makes love to Radha for the last time before leaving her and finds that she is not responding. On his enquiring “…do you mind my kisses love, and she said/no, not at all, but thought, what is/it to the corpse if the maggots nip?”(Soul…Sing 52) Radha, the woman, feels like a ‘corpse’ since either her will is not considered or the thought of his going away is bothering her so much that physical love is not what she wants at that time. Even, the eternal lover, Krishna, is unable to understand this and in her heart she compares his ‘love making’ to ‘maggots’ nipping at her lifeless body. Yet, she is unable to convey her true feelings to him since women don’t have an option therein or are unable to say it because of unsaid patriarchal norms. It is quite a rebuff at the society which considers Krishna to be
the greatest lover. This lack of communion with the feminine principle, thus, goes to prehistoric, mythological era. Her body feels ‘beaten’ because for man she is nothing else but a means to satisfy his own ‘body.’ So each time the lust of the man is satisfied and he turns his back towards him, she pitifully cries out ‘…don’t you want me any longer.’ (“Ghanshyam” Soul…Sing117) The dying lover in ‘The Seashore’ requests for ‘more time ...(to) learn to love’ (Soul…Sing53) just as we humans wish the former health of the Earth to return, but what is done can no longer be undone, and the lady sees him go away from her ‘…And feel the loss of love I(she) never once received’. Man has forgotten to love the other, be it woman or nature and to overcome that he has put both in bondage. Das bursts out in “The Old Playhouse”:

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her

…so that she would forget

…her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless

pathways of the sky. (Das, Playhouse 1)

Man attempts to put ‘nature’/ womankind in prison so that she ‘forgets’ her nature to fly in order to explore the myriad terrains available. But can a swallow be made to forget her inner calling to fly? You can bind these free ‘birds’ for a while but they will fly as soon as they can free themselves of the shackles. However, she regrets that: “Cowering beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and/ became a dwarf.” The stunted mental and spiritual growth of woman is the result of patriarchal domination. Das also notices that the man’s room is “always lit by artificial lights, your windows always shut. Even the air conditioner helps so little, / all-pervasive is the male scent of your breath.” (1) Even the cut flowers ‘smell of human sweat.’ All connections have been severed from nature, the
predicament of the age, so “there is no more singing, no more dance,” no joy of life. She had gone to him to know who she was and thereby “grow” but “every lesson you(he) gave was about your(him)self.”(1) Women are tutored in every way to go against their nature and fit into societal norms. Kamala Das has been very bitter about it and wrote in her poem “Introduction”

...Fit in, Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don’t sit
On walls or peep in through our lace- draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala...
...Don’t cry embarrassingly loud
Don’t be a … Nympho (Soul...Sing 120)

She encounters men who are all ‘in a hungry haste of rivers, in me the ocean’s tireless /Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and every one, /The answer is, it is I.’ (120) All round she sees each of them ‘packed like a sword in its sheath,’ bound by society without an independent existence. Whereas she says, ‘It is I who drink lonely/ Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns, /It is I who laugh …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.’ (120) She is searching for her identity in this colonized world. Her nagging question is the reason for discrimination in society against women, why are they considered ‘lesser beings’, even though it is women who are the healers, the comfort givers.

We read another poem, “Sleeping in the Moonlight” where she says:

My beloved brought to me after
Thirty silent years for emotional
Repairs. Which moon fed you lunacy
While you lay safe kept in air-cooled chambers
Rich man in the mansion he himself built?
Through which shuttered window did it leak to
Plunder your dear mind of memories? (Soul...Sing 41)

She had learnt as a child that sleeping in moonlight made a person mad, her beloved was very cautious and would always sleep safely in ‘air-cooled chambers’ and ‘shuttered windows’, yet he lost his sanity in his ripe years to make Kamala question living in artificial environment as opposed to natural one. The ‘rich’ people sow their own destruction since they are able to spend on the luxury of ‘air-cooling’ and keeping windows shut so as to sever all connections with nature. Das is one of the ‘dare devil’ types in her clan but she is speaking for all womankind, those who are aware, unaware, courageous or timid.

In every possible way, man tries to tame nature/woman, physically, mentally or spiritually.

On sedatives

I am more lovable

Says my husband

… he would if he could

Sing lullabies to his wife’s sleeping soul (Soul...Sing 85)

To control the natural energy of his wife, he gives her unnatural sedatives. He would like to ‘sing lullabies’ to the ‘sleeping soul’ of his wife instead of. The whole intention is to dominate, to curb, to strangle the free spirit of the ‘Earth’, the ‘woman’.
When Kamala Das becomes old and is ‘disabled’, she yearns for the proximity of ‘nature’ in order to be rejuvenated, which she tries to gather from twelve year old Chandrima, who brings in “…the aromas of the vast outdoors,/the scent of sunburnt lawns,/the hot fragrance of/summer’s laburnum,/the smell of her Labrador...”. This effort, if not altogether futile, remains inadequate since (Das, Closure59)

Kamala Das laments again, in the poem “The Suicide”:

Sea, toss my body back
That he knew how to love,
...Take in my naked soul
That he knew how to hurt.
Only the soul knows how to sing
At the vortex of the sea. (Soul...Sing 110)

She wishes her soul to be separated from her body, so that she can tear herself away from ‘The only one who seems to know/ The only way to hurt.’(110) The Sea is her only solace since its ‘vortex’ is ‘warm’ even though it has a cold exterior. Her only wish was ‘to take a long walk/into the sea/and lie there, resting, /completely uninvolved.’ Then, she realizes that wishing for ‘rest’ is also a type of ‘hunger,’ ‘a minor whim’. She decides, therefore, to feed only the ‘basic hunger’ that is to ‘crumble, /to dissolve’ to be one with existence. This is what ‘eco feminism’ strives for and excavates as Shiva puts it: ‘The sacred is the bond that connects the part to the whole.’ (Mies 99) Here, with Das, feeding her hunger by ‘dissolving’ becomes pre-emptive and also desirable leading towards immortality and ‘the freedom to /discompose.’(“Composition” Soul...Sing 32-33)
‘Liberation’ too can happen with this holistic attitude and “only as part of a larger struggle for the preservation of life on this planet” (Introduction Mies 16) Kamala Das is again and again reminded of the body being ‘earth’, in “I shall not forget” she says while she watched her father dying ‘…The earth had entered the skin/ soundlessly.’ *(Soul...Sing 76)* She envisions ‘life’ in ‘death’ and makes humans see the reality of their being in “Daughter of the Century”

Yes, Death promotes a kind of life.

Who can say for certain that we are superior

To the maggots that eat us in the end? *(Soul...Sing165)*

We are not inclined to see this reality which glares us in our face, time and again, drilling the fact that we are nothing but the ‘earth’ once the soul within escapes. Our bodies differ from the animals, the trees etc. but the material culmination for all living beings is to be reduced to ‘earth’. Nature does not provide mankind with a different resultant or alternative in death. In fact it is the ‘maggots’ which thrive on the dead bodies, making them continue their own life after the death of the human body. Again and again, Das is trying to drill in the truth that the ‘pride’ of mankind is inconsequential since ‘nature’ levels all. “Dust into dust descendeth” said Omar Khayam yet we are loath to admit it and revel in our misconception of so called human “greatness”. Then, yet again, here is “A Request” by Kamala Das

When I die

Do not throw

The meat and bones away

But pile them up
And let them tell
By their smell
What life was worth
On this earth
What love was worth
In the end. (Soul...Sing104)

How long can we overlook this blatant truth of life that levels the greatest of ‘Ozymandius’ (P.B. Shelley) with the puniest of creatures? One needs to be constantly aware of this reality to clear our illusions of ‘human greatness’. This body about which one is so much concerned is a ‘worthless’ pile of bones. Even ‘love’ becomes meaningless on realizing that it is simply human ‘ego’ that tries to consider itself as the master of the world.

Kamala Das says:

I am at peace. I liken God to a tree which has its parts the leaves, the bark, the fruits and the flowers each unlike the other in appearance and in texture but in each lying dissolved the essence of the tree, the whatness of it. Quiditus. Each component obeys its own destiny. The flowers blossom, scatter pollen and dry up. The fruits ripen and fall. The bark peels. Each of us shall obey that colossal wisdom, the taproot of all wisdom and the source of all consciousness.” (Das, My Story 213)
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