

“A Journey with no Return”: Kamala Das and the Poetic Manifesto of Flânerie

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Abstract: Kamala Das has carved a unique space for herself within Indian Writings in English with a career spanning almost six decades. By the time her first collection of poetry *Summer in Calcutta* (1965) was published she was already a name to reckon with. Being nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1984 did catapult her to fame on the global front and consequently her oeuvre has further gone on to impact the polemics surrounding the understanding of what constitutes world/contemporary literature. This paper engages with the evolution in the critical approaches towards understanding her poetry in English beginning with how her poetry was perceived as an epitome of Modernism within the discourse of Postcolonialism and going on to contextualise the potential of her poetry to engage with the evolving critical discourses of Geocriticism. The focus will be on redefining her literary identity by imbibing the nuances associated with the notion of flânerie. Etymologically, it implies aimless wandering, but as a critical theoretical concept it engages with the contours of belonging by questioning the discursive practices of gender that comes into play in the accessibility of spaces.

Keywords: Kamala Das, Indian Writings in English, Poetry, Cosmopolitanism, Flânerie, Flâneuse

Introduction

Poets are edible

material, even one at

death's door can provide

a research scholar

a memorable feast.

-Kamala Das[i]

Kamala, Kamala Das, Madhavikutty and Kamala Surraiyya[ii], the writer, the persona or the enigmatic literal presence known to us through these names, is predicated within the academic and to a great extent, within the non-academic space also, as a flaneuse — a passionate observer, who is at ease within multiplicities, who feels at home everywhere, who is at the centre of everything yet remains elusive. This paper engages with the legacy of hers within the ambit of a vibrant area like Indian Literatures in English, particularly poetry, which she wrote under the pseudonym- Kamala Das (hence this becomes the referent for this paper). As far as this category goes, Indian poets have deftly manoeuvred language and the need to discern their multiple ways of engagement with words particularly in their engagement with its essential feature — within the universal space there is a prominent role for the particular, the local. Thus, in effect, this paper tries to contextualise Kamala Das' poetry within the discourse of Indian Literatures in English and World/Contemporary Literature by foregrounding two parameters, language and location, even when it is not limited by these.

Kamala Das has a literary lineage going back to the roots of the Malayalam literary tradition as her mother, Balamani Amma and her maternal uncle Nalapatt Narayan Menon were prominent Malayalam literary figures and so was Das under the 'nom de plume', Madhavikutty. Equally important is her role in the comparatively new, yet equally vivid tradition of Indian Literatures in English. She was among the harbingers of Modernism and had a substantial formative influence on the younger poets, directly, through Bahutantrika[iii] – an informal literary gathering she held at her home in Bombay in the 1960s and indirectly through her verse. Running parallel to these traditions are the legacies of women's writing in India[iv] and women's writing[v] at large. Furthermore, as Devika Nair concludes in her article, "Kamala Das: many selves, many tongues":

Perhaps the greatest "work" of hers is the alter self whom she

created, this mysterious and puzzling, ambiguous and sphinx-like

“persona” that is Kamala Das, who emerges from her writings taking

Protean forms – to fascinate and charm, to tease and torment, to hold

and enthrall, and to reveal her world anew with each new reading.[vi]

Her situatedness[vii] within these various traditions and her engagement with them from the point of language and location, as a nomad[viii], is problematized in this paper, by focusing on the ambivalence in her verse. A critical overview of her oeuvre is given, followed by a detailed engagement with her poem “An Introduction” as a means of understanding how far the discourse surrounding flânerie with modern/ postmodern identity is reflected in her works on various levels.

Palimpsestous Kamala Das

Today let this paper receive my dripping blood. Let me write like one not in the least burdened by the thoughts about the future, turning each word into a negotiation with my life lived so far. I like to call this poetry. I like to call this poetry even if my words lose their music when, after raising in my innards a beautiful liquid turbulence, they come to surface in the relatively solid contours of prose. I had always longed for the strength necessary to write this. But poetry does not grow ripe for us; we have to grow ripe enough for poetry[ix]

As is the case with a significant majority of writers in the tradition of Indian Literatures in English, Kamala Das was a bilingual writer – writing in English and Malayalam – her mother tongue; experimenting with literary genres such as poetry, short story, novels, plays and autobiography. Evidently, she made her presence felt across languages and genres. Even though my research focuses on her poetry in English, the entire gamut of her works is taken into consideration in order to understand her poetry, mainly because there is an acknowledged interchange between genres and languages in her case. Critics[x] have pointed to her poetic prose and prosaic poetry and also to subtle presence of Malayalam in her writings in English and vice versa.

Though my research accounts for these and many more reverberations within the works of Kamala Das, the major works that are critically examined include eight poetry collections of Kamala Das published between 1965 and 2009. They are *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and other Poems* (1973), *Tonight*, this

Savage Rite (1979) – a collection in collaboration with Pritish Nandy, Collected Poems Vol.1 (1984), The Best of Kamala Das (1991) edited by P. P. Raveendran, Only the Soul Knows how to Sing (1996) and Closure: Some Poems and a Conversation (2009) – a collaborated work with Suresh Kohli. Other than these, her short story collections, novels, and autobiography can offer insights to understand her craft. Wages of Love (2013), a posthumous collection of her unpublished works edited by Suresh Kohli and her biography The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das (2010) by Merrily Weisbord too become crucial texts to understand the many patterns that have gone into the palimpsest that she creates. Adding to these is the latest collection, Kamala Das: Selected Poems (2014) edited with an insightful introduction by Devindra Kohli, a close friend of hers and a prominent scholar on her work.

There are certain aspects that gain prominence while examining the poetry of Kamala Das – how words and/or languages are manipulated to aid in comprehending the many apprehensions arising out of lived experiences; methods of narration that are relied on to achieve this and the consequent creation of an exclusive niche. Moreover, the evocation of the metaphor of palimpsest and the implications of the act of erasure are pertinent as far as Kamala Das is concerned. It becomes one of the ways in which the paradox, contradictions and multifariousness within her and their consequent immanence onto the ambivalence in her verse, can be approached, which will be reflected in the next section through the analysis of “An Introduction”.

The thematic concerns of her poetry testifies to the openness that she practised towards the many experiences in her life. They range from nostalgia for her lost childhood, land and ancestral home to her personal engagement with dualisms, arising out of her encounters with various places, people and religions, establishing her as a migrant in space and time. Moreover, her seemingly unconventional style of writing filled with “vernacular oddities”[xi], where the voice operates between idelect and dialect, stresses a claim over her roots, on the notion of locality. It can be conjectured that the confessional mode of writing that she utilised gave her the much needed dispensations for working within these apparent inconsistencies and/or paradoxes, though she tapped the immense possibilities that arose from these and at times moved beyond “the politically correct anguish of writing in English” as indicated by Eunice de Souza.[xii]

Still, she brings in elements that move beyond the local realm in her poetry, highlighting a pan—Indian, and on some level, a cosmopolitan world beyond the notion of a globalised or universalised world. The apparent vacillant position of hers can be understood as her

attempt at creating a dialogue between the socio-political milieu in which she was living and the evolving linguistic milieu within it, thereby linking it to the shades of cosmopolitanism. An understanding of the panorama painted by Das through her life and writing and her gradual yet informed acceptance of the diversity of self opens the evolving frontiers of the discourse of Cosmopolitanism, which on many levels still continues to engage with the aftermaths of colonialism and a post-colonial society in transition. Incidentally, this is also an aspect that played a poignant part in establishing Das as a strong poetic voice.

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

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

In my analysis of Kamala Das’ entire oeuvre, it is been observed that if it is at all possible to posit a stage-wise evolution going by the chronology of her publication, three possible stages that can be identified. However, it has to be explicitly stated here that there are many of her poems that refuse to be tied down to a chronology. Thus, to posit a division, first stage comprises of the works published between 1965 and 1984. This stage is characterised by poems arising out of the liminal space created by an intense nostalgia and the need to understand her self within the various displacements to places such as Kolakata, Mumbai and Pune. The underlying sense that is communicated is a sense of ambivalence regarding the assertion of a self, leading to a crisis, where she is not sure which self to assert- the private self or the public vocational self. 1985- 1996, forms the second stage, which is characterised by a sense of an awakened social consciousness, characterised by a journey

from interior to exterior with intense self-reflection on both, and an assertion of self. Third stage can be identified in the period from 1997 to 2009, where the dominant aspect is a sense of ennui and the notion that gaining closure, as far as self and identity are concerned, is a myth.

There is an inconsistency in the themes if the chronology of her published poems are taken into account. Since there is a need to address this, her poems are grouped under different heads by identifying a point of liminality. However the poems listed under each head are not bound by the chronological idea of time as implied earlier. She started publishing in 1965, but P.P. Raveendran's research suggests that she started writing earlier. So, when her entire oeuvre is taken into consideration there are about seven decades of writing that have to be accounted for. This aspect poses as a challenge to any kind of classification of her poetry. Hence this classification tries to move beyond it and tries to understand the evolution of her poetic theme and style in conjunction with her life.

Poetry and more importantly creativity for Kamala Das originates from a point of liminality. For instance, a majority of her oeuvre include the poems that seem to have developed from a liminal space which she occupied while she longed for her Tharavadu, her Grandmother and her ancestral land and folktales inherent within, from her displaced locations. We could also read this into her childhood in Kolkata too. The liminal space that she straddled due to her physical displacement creates a sense of nostalgia within her. Another such space could be the one initiated by her psychological displacement created by a domesticated life and this stage is characterised by a sense of being experienced as opposed to the possible stage of innocence in her. There is also a phase characterised by a sense of ennui.

Since spatial dynamics takes on a new meaning when approaching her from the concept of *flânerie*, it is pertinent to note that her poems seems to be evoking a sense of aimless wandering, yet going onto find new areas for exploration. For instance, poems evoking nostalgia such as “ My Grandmother's House”, “ A Hot Noon in Malabar”, “Nani”, to name a few, are representations or re- interpretation of a memory and it reflects a sense of timelessness and such poems, pertaining to a longing for past are found throughout her career.

Another major theme that her poetry takes up is a certain kind of self reflexivity about creativity and sea becomes a recurring symbol in many of the poems, evoking a sense of transition. It can be posited these poems represent the liminal space from which the creative

person called Kamala Das came into being. The most prominent examples of such poems are “Words”, “Loudposters”, “Someone Else’s Songs”, “Composition”, “Annamalai Poems”, “The Munafique” etc...

Another major chunk would be her City Poems such as “The Dance of the Eunuchs”, “The Freaks”, “The Wild Bougainvillea” among others. These poems encapsulate a large corpus of her poems which engages with a sense of dialectics between binaries/ dualities such as love and lust, body and soul, physical and spiritual. There is also an evident note of hatred or a critique of misogynistic tendencies in these poems which could also refer to the transitions from an apparent sense of innocence to that of experience, transition within herself into a stereotype and the simultaneous need to break away from it.

Another significant intervention comes in through her Hospital Poems such as “After the Illness”, “My November”, “The Lunatic Asylum”, “Fathima” etc and the ones on Old age such as “At Chiangi Airport”, “Life’s Obscure Parallell”, “Old Cattle”, “On Ageing”, “End of Youth” etc. These poems also evoke a sense of nostalgia, a looking back, but there is a slight difference here as it comes with the realisation that it is not possible to gain closure. Interestingly, if we consider her poems from the 1990s onwards there are some significant deviations. During this phase she wrote very little and from the themes of the poems in this period it can be understood that most of them might be written from the notes she might have had for poems from earlier times, before she took ill. Incidentally, most of the poems dwell upon the journeys abroad particularly her stay in Canada with her biographer Emily Weisebord. Most of the poems included in this group are contemplation on her life and more poignantly offers a retrospective look at her lived reality. For instance, there are poems that intensely question her conversion to Islam. It could also be noted here that this is the phase in which she wrote her only collection of poetry in Malayalam “Yaa Allah”.

Intervening through “An Introduction”

“An Introduction”, one of Kamala Das’ oft-quoted and anthologised poems was first published in her 1965 collection *Summer in Calcutta*, has come to be understood as the poem that defines and defies her. The choice of this poem as an entry point into Kamala Das is legitimised by the words of the critic K Satchidhanandhan, “ ‘An Introduction’ is itself a polyphonic text with several of the poet’s voices seeking articulation in a single verbal construct. [...] she situates herself more specifically using nationality, complexion, place of birth and the languages known, an ironic filling up of an ungiven form.” He viewed this poem as a comprehensive articulation of the different individual and social components

that go into the making of women's writing, which also contextualises this paper. (Das 1996: 11) Evoking the image of palimpsest and the idea of tracing out the apparent layers also get a push from the above words which poignantly highlight the irony at the centre of "I" in the universe of Das. "I" as stated above, becomes an ironic filling up of a non-existing "I" – a presence which has at its centre a discernable absence — a black hole to put it metaphorically— and powerfully evokes the Derridean trace.

On the other hand, the engagement with 'I' on multiple levels in the poem points to the inevitability of it being qualified as a palimpsest. The pattern discerned on the surface, — the "I"— is not composed of a single layer, but there are multiple layers that go into it, enriching it— 'I' — as a whole. This section goes on to unveil each layer and interrogates the possibility of other layers which makes their presence felt even in their absence. The poem by touching upon many aspects that define a person also problematizes 'I' starting off with the lines: "I don't know politics, but I know the names/Of those in power, and can repeat them like/Days of week, or names of months, beginning with /Nehru. I am Indian... (1965: 62)[xiv]

These lines consciously link 'I', the idea of self, to the inevitability of a political awareness or consciousness, ironically positioned from an apparent vantage position of ignorance. Clearly, the tinge of sarcasm has to be understood here as she alludes to the fact that the only fact needed to assert the identity of 'I' as an Indian, is to merely by heart the names of those in power. Thus, the first 'I' that is encountered— highlighting a political consciousness linked to the self— is, in itself, a paradox playing with the ideas of knowledge and ignorance and at the outset, situates the whole poem as an outcome of an inevitable power play.

This particular idea of the self becomes pertinent while engaging with the idea of cosmopolitanism too, particularly if its roots to the early Greco- Roman engagements with the idea of citizenship are considered. The debates around the aspect of universality in being a citizen of a nation, such as India, given the notion of unity in diversity that is upheld and the implications of an apparent proclamation of locality, which is in itself beset with problems, is problematized by Das, as is evident from the lines that follow: "I am Indian, very brown, born in/Malabar,..." (1965:62)

Clearly, this 'I' linked to the initial 'I' and among the many 'I's to be encountered, engages with a physical situatedness— 'I', here is an entity defined by geographical space, and on a broader plane looks into the political subtexts of a self— 'I'being a citizen of

India, ironically, called a dark skinned Malabari[xv]. It is a conscious act here evoking the paradox of existence – yoking together a universalist discourse and a regional one— a pertinent part of the discourse of postcolonialism, popularly known as postcolonial paradox[xvi]— while engaging with the notion of a nation or national identity. Interestingly, her play with locality within the nationalistic paradigm points to those skeins of cosmopolitan thought which, in effect, critiques the notion of homogenisation at the centre of postcolonial discourse. This is along the lines of what Robert Spenser saw as cosmopolitanism – self-awareness imbibing within it the broader sense of moral and political responsibility. [xvii]

The subtle implication of the presence of traces or subtexts that go into the creation of ‘I’, in these lines alludes to the motif of palimpsest. ‘I’ that is encountered is not just limited to the same ‘I’, it enters into a play with the absent ‘I’— effecting a trace of ‘I’ to allude to Derrida. This oft-quoted poem of hers is an epitome of how her words move beyond superficiality, creating an effect similar to ripples in a still pond, ripples which carry reverberations from the depths of the pond and can go on to manifest itself to the very ends and circumference of the pond. Interestingly, the next ‘I’ to be encountered is linked to the linguistic domain powerfully forcing our attention to the role played by language in locating the self, as Octavio Paz proclaims in *Alternating Current*:

Literature is the expression of a feeling of deprivation, a recourse against a sense of something missing. But the contrary is also true: Language is what makes us human. It is a recourse against the meaningless noise and silence of nature and history. Living implies speaking, and without speech man cannot have a full life. Poetry, which is the perfection of speech —language speaking to itself—is an invitation to enjoy the whole of life (172)

These lines allude to Das’ preoccupation with language, one of the themes that she deals with throughout her poetic career. She rightly proclaims:

I speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one. Don’t write in English, they said,

English is not your mother- tongue. Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? (1965: 62)

At the outset, the reference to more than one language here evokes a new set of problems and simultaneously evokes a sense of ambiguity and ambivalence.

She does not spell out explicitly which are the languages that she refers to in these lines. It can be assumed that the three languages here could refer to Malayalam- her mother tongue, English- the tongue she adopted and/ or Bengali with which she might have had close encounters as she spent a considerable part of her childhood in Calcutta. However, as it was Bengali that she was not competent in, it could be posited as the reason why the three slowly diminished into two. The two could very easily be posited as English and Malayalam as she refers to it as the languages she writes in. Yet, the move towards one is still a matter of contention as it could be either of the two or a unique language of her imaginary realm.

Underlying all these is her reference to a language in which she dreams – the presence of the third language, beset with ambiguities could imply a kind of prototypical language shared by all and which for her radiates from somewhere within. This aspect becomes crucial in implying a going back to a consciousness, an oneness with nature as is also implied in the aboriginal tradition of dreamtime[xviii] or a female language as outlined by the theories of Luce Irigaray.[xix]

While engaging with her negotiations with language, the journey from three to two and finally to one has to be scrutinised. However, it is also possible to see her slow migration from a dialectics arising out of the encounters between the three to a sort of a binary relation in the two, moving onto a continuum, establishing an emanating merging of the two into each other forming a single language. Hence, the trajectory from three to two to one need not be seen reductively as a shrinking down of languages but could be seen as a means of the three converging into one which gains relevance as the poem progresses.

However, apart from the polemics surrounding the use of languages she is also acknowledging the very dominant presence of dualisms that privilege the act of speaking over writing and in the dynamics and the dialectics involving these two acts the act of dreaming is somehow sidelined. She emphasises on this third language as a language

without any barriers as such. But she does powerfully evoke the need to endorse this quintessential language within and tap its many resources. However, it has to be noted that she does privilege Indian English, (which makes one wonder if this is the one that she talks about) as is evident from the following lines from the same poem: “The language I speak/ Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness/ All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half/ Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,” (1965:62)

On the other hand, another pertinent aspect here is the privilege of choice when it comes to a language which gets contextualised in the polemics surrounding the same in postcolonial discourses. This aspect of choice, thus, becomes a pertinent issue not just in the case of Kamala Das but also with the whole oeuvre of postcolonial literature. As is evident, from the lines quoted above, she is vehemently advised against using the language of her choice, against writing in English, as it is not her ‘mother tongue’. This is an issue that she will be revisiting throughout her career and on many levels too and she rightly reasserts and reiterates her choice when she proclaims: “It is as human as I am human, don’t/ You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my/ Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions,” (1965:62)

Inadvertently, if these lines are scrutinised, there is an added layer of contradiction, where, at one point, she talks about English as the language she writes in, against which she is warned, as it is an alien tongue, — an ‘other’ tongue— and not her mother tongue. But, then, she moves on from the language she writes in to the language she speaks, but here she is referring to it as “half English, half Indian” which is the most honest and is claimed by her as the speech of her mind. It is interesting to see the evolution in the play with language in her universe. The journey from three to one runs parallel to the journey of English as the other to “half English, half Indian”, from a language she writes in to the language she speaks. The view of Pritish Nandy on the same has to be used in this context: “She never wrote the English that others expected her to. She wrote it as it came to her. It was an unlearned, unkempt language which turned into magic in her hands. It was the true language of poetry and it made Kamala Das what she was, one of the finest and truest poets of her generation.”(103)[xx]

These lines also points to the polemics of language that was central to the intellectual debates in India at that time. It is a fact attested to by history that when the constitution was framed in the year 1950, it was proposed that English as a language will be phased out by 1965 and Hindi will be reinstated as the only language. However, following the protest against the eradication of English as such there was an “Official Languages Act of 1964”,

[xxi] which added English as “one of the official languages of India”. The protest against the continuance of English in its official capacity was at its height in mid 1960s when Kamala Das published this work. So her engagement with language here gains an added relevance.

Another substantial insight into her play with languages can be intervened through “interlingual”, an idea proposed by K.Satchidhanadhan to comprehend the language created by Das, while talking about ‘Kamala Das and the tradition of bilingual creativity’[xxii]: “Her works in English look like a translation of Malayalam and her works in Malayalam are like a translation from English. Her language gave a kind of peculiar quality to her works. She was more interlingual than bilingual. Lack of formal education in both languages forced her to create her own language. She was not obsessed with grammar. That made her language different from that used by other writers”[xxiii]

There could be one more dimension to this. As a bilingual writer, equally proficient in Malayalam and English, she does not really have to question the use of her mother tongue, Malayalam, as it is natural for her to use it. She does not have to really question her choice or to ponder on the limits of liberty to waddle in it. But while writing in English— an apparent alien language— she has to be conscious about it and probe into why such a language suits her purpose. Ironically, she designates this half and half language as “honest” and “as human as I am human.” It is the real self, as she goes on to explicate. However, she claims that it is a language that is unique. A language that is her niche, a language that differentiates her from others, which is, “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.” (1965:62)

The ambivalence that she finds herself in when it comes to her language, the language she speaks in, with its distortions and which implies a sense of fragmentation as evident from her description of it as ‘half and half’, powerfully evokes the dividedness that she senses in the essence of her self. This fragmentation is, in a way, something that reiterates the impossibility of the process of meaning making or of properly putting across a message even with the resources of languages at hand. The various implications of her verse, particularly, those arguments on language, in a way, alludes to Jacques Lacan’s thesis[xxiv] that language essentially takes us away from a realisation of self. This leads to the possible conclusion that she was a translingual rather than interlingual, as she, through the language she used communicated a sense of ambivalence and the impossibility of gaining closure.

Needless to argue then, that the concerns of Kamala Das dwell upon notions of identity and its articulation, with language playing a crucial role in it. The 'I' here is a post-colonial Indian, plagued by questions such as — “Who am I?”, “Am I an Indian?” “If yes, then why am I marked out because of my skin colour or my domicile?” — “Which language do I speak in and why?”, “What is it that defines my choice of a language?” “What are the problems evoked if I speak in an ‘other’ tongue?”— “Where do I belong as a person in all of these discourses?” The questions that surge up are numerous and it is her engagement with these kernels that added a touch of contradictory hues to her poetry, simple image continuing into a narrative of complexities. Each of these questions goes onto create layers onto the patterns on the surface of the 'I' and she seems to be traversing all these spaces simultaneously, evoking the image of a flâneuse who dares to go into the unexplored trajectories, unlike a flâneur. As highlighted by Rituparna Pal in her article, “Women & Flânerie: Daring To Wander & Own The Streets Of A City Off-Limits”:

Flânerie becomes even more interesting when you successfully manage to get lost. You chalk out a virtual map of the locality from your memory, draw imaginary lines, get excited about finally realising the utility of learning Geometry in school, take the left that, your calculations tell, should bring you back to familiarity – lo and behold, you find yourself in another parallel universe.

The 'I' constituted by an in-betweenness— a *différance*, “a contradictory coherence”[xxv]— is relevant to understand Kamala Das. The notion of the national subject that she evokes right at the outset governed by a set of knowledge about political leaders, the founding fathers of the idea called nation, does not hinge on a notion of homogeneity. On the other hand, a heterogeneous existence comes into the picture as the poem progresses. For instance, her self, the self she calls 'I' in her poem is encompassed by notions of political identity, personal identity, regional identity and linguistic identity. The ambivalence in her is connected to these aspects. Clearly, all these entities come into play in determining the human in her, a sense of the essential being, a being which taps the natural self as the real subjectivity; transcending all other entities created by the externalities –stressing a psychological or archetypical engagement with the self . As Honey Sethi observes, “In the twilight zone in which the creative mind dwells, there is the natural feminine ability to turn inwards, to accept intuition and tenderness as values along with the gentle sensitivity to one’s natural environment and to the latent human communications among human beings which mobilize the feelings and imageries and bring forth the new feminine voices creating new terrains.”[xxvi]

It becomes imperative here to see the new terrain she created as a palimpsest, into which she transposes her multifariousness and the only way to grab at those many layers of scripts is to understand her life and the complexities that eventually got superimposed into the earlier layers. A propos to this are certain layers which make their presence felt even in their absence and the ‘other’ layers evident in the poem – those layers that engage with her gendered identity, a paradoxical persona which gains significant coherence through the image of a *flâneuse*.

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[i] See Das, Kamala, "Researchers" Closure: Some Poems and a Conversation

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

[iii] See Kohli, Devindra "Introduction", *Kamala Das: Selected Poems*. This insightful essay on Das is useful to gain an understanding of the general intellectual climate in India from the 1960's till the declaration of emergency in the early 1970's

[iv] See Tharu, Susie and K. Lalitha, "Madhavikutty". *Women's Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, vol. 2

[v] Kamala Das' "An Introduction" is the only Asian poem included in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

[vi] Nair, Devika, "Kamala Das: many selves, many tongues". *Friday Review: The Hindu Thiruvananthapuram*, April 2, 2015 <<<http://www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/kdas-many-selves-many-tongues/article7056859.ece>>> April 2, 2015. Accessed October 10, 2015.

[vii] At the outset, Situatedness is used here to signify the act of embeddedness within a culture. However, it has to be stated here that situatedness as a concept is also linked to the location of subject /subjectivity in feminist discourses especially in the theory of Julia Kristeva. The idea is delineated in her essay "The System and the Speaking Subject" and the notion of situatedness focuses on the recognition of a subject's location and is seen as crucial in understanding the subject/ subjectivity. Donna Haraway too maintains that location and situation – – environments one inhabits – – lend a great deal to one's subjectivity specially technological, literary, cultural, political, economic and social situatedness.

[viii] Nomad is used here literally and metaphorically. Common meaning of a wanderer as well as the idea evoked by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a figure which represents appropriately the post – modern subject who had to shift between contexts or spaces gains relevance here. Nomad and the related idea of planes of consistency could be engaged with at length to understand Kamala Das' oeuvre.

[ix] See Das, Kamala. *My Story*

[x] Though many critics have engaged with this aspect, the reference here has largely to do with the excerpts from the lecture delivered by Prof. Udaya Kumar. He referred to the intermixing of language and genre in Kamala Das in his paper "Choosing a Tongue, choosing a Form: Kamala Das's Writing and the Parsing of Perception" which he delivered at the Symposium on "Kamala Das and the Tradition of Bilingual Creativity" held at the Institute of English, University of Kerala in collaboration with Sahitya Academy on 24th March 2015. His paper engaged more with the idea that Das's poetry in English displays a directness and fluency usually associated with prose, while her early prose fiction draws on arrangements of language that is largely poetic thus moving beyond the politics of choice of a language.

[xi] See Rumens, Carol, “Dislocated Carnality”. Poetry Review

[xii] See De Souza, Eunice. “Kamala Das”, *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*.

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

[xiv] See Das, Kamala. “An Introduction”, *Summer in Calcutta*

[xv] Malabar was a part of the Madras presidency till the division of India into States on the basis of the regional languages in 1956. The derogatory reference to a South Indian as *madrasi* is subtly hinted at here.

[xvi] Postcolonial paradox refers to the ambivalence that is often associated with the conflicts between the roots and routes, between the one’s own culture and that of the adopted culture which becomes pertinent in the formation of identity. The most prominent example is that of a rooted rootlessness.

[xvii] Spencer, Robert. *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature*

[xviii] The Australian Aboriginal belief in the phenomenon called dreaming and dreamtime has its roots in the indigenous Arandic (language of the Aranda people of Central Australia) word *Alcheringa*, which subtly alludes to the possible meanings such as “eternal, uncreated”, “time out of time” or “everywhen”. The animist mythology of these indigenous people dreamtime refers to the sacred era in which the ancestral totemic beings created the world. It also stems from the belief that an individual’s entire ancestry exists as one, thus leading to the idea that all worldly knowledge is accumulated through one’s ancestors. In conjunction with this concept is the idea of dreaming, which refers to an individual’s or a group’s sets of beliefs or spirituality. For instance, a native indigenous person might say that he has a Kangaroo Dreaming – which implies that s/he has the spirit of that animal within the self. Thus, dreaming existed before the life of the individual began and continues to exist when the life of the individual ends.

[xix] See Irigaray, Lucy. *Speculum of the Other Woman*

[xx] See Nandy, Pritish. “Remembering Kamala” Tonight this Savage rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy.

[xxi] Continuance of English language for official purposes of the Union and for use in Parliament.-(1)Notwithstanding the expiration of the period of fifteen years from the commencement of the Constitution the English language may, as from the appointed day, continue to be used, in addition to Hindi:- (a) for all official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before that day, and (b) for the transaction of business in Parliament; Provided that the English language shall be used for purposes of communication between the Union and a State which has not adopted Hindi as its Official Language.

[xxii] K Satchidhandhan’s keynote address at the Symposium ‘Kamala Das and the tradition of bilingual creativity’ jointly organized by the Sahitya Akademi and University of Kerala at the Institute of English on March 25th 2015.

[xxiii] See “Kamala’s concerns were beyond feminism: Satchidanandan” <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/Kamalas-concerns-were-beyond-feminism-Satchidanandan/articleshow/46685275.cms>

[xxiv] Jacques Lacan posits three stages – the first, Imaginary refers to the first 6 months in the life of an infant when it feels itself to be complete and in harmony with the world at large, where its incomprehensible talk is taken to mean something significant by others around it, the second stage, the symbolic starts when the child is initiated into a language as well as a process of unlearning where it is asked to give up on the words it had used as an infant and is encouraged to use the ‘real’ words and hence ironically here the child gets confused as the process of meaning making or identification of self is many times removed from reality and the third stage Real is in fact an imaginary stage where there is the possibility of the signifier and the signified colliding which could be a reference to those moments of epiphany or ultimate self-realisation which is a next to impossible task according to Jacques Lacan.

[xxv] See note vii

[xxvi] See Sethi, Honey, “A Feminist Wisdom in the Poetry of Kamala Das”, International Journal of Technical Research (IJTR) Vol. 2Issue 1. Mar-Apr 2013