



Knowledgeable Research

ISSN 2583-6633

Vol.02, No.10, May, 2024

<http://knowledgeableresearch.com/>

Kamala Das: A Dweller with Existential Alienation

¹Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and ²Dr. Reshu Shukla

¹Assistant Professor (English), MHPG College, Moradabad

²Assistant Professor (English), S.B.D. P.G. College, Dhampur, Bijnor, UP, India.

Email: reshushukla20082@gmail.com

Abstract:

The present paper makes an attempt to examine whether Kamala Das is a dweller with existential alienation or not. This discourse, first of all, tries to figure out what 'alienation' is, what its types are, and what its cause and effect bring chaos in one's life. Moreover, how thinkers, categorizing it into various groups, have dealt with it, is also its inevitable part. Secondly, it tries to find out how it (alienation) affects the world literature—chiefly, the Pan-Indian literature—that witnesses its hallmarks on its aura. Thirdly, it endeavours to define 'existential alienation' to find and point out its essential characteristics in Indian English literature. To attain its pinnacle, this paper, finally, aims to investigate such traces of existential alienation in Kamala Das' oeuvres (be it prose or poetry) that have both a butterfly and tornado effect on her social, psychological, and philosophical life. In doing so, all the possible research methods and approaches—discourse analysis, textual analysis, archival methods, academic, creative, and critical writing, descriptive, explorative, and mixed-method research approaches—are used with hungry eyes for a coveted aftermath..

Keywords: *Existential Alienation, Priori, Atomism, Anomie, Dionysian, Hara-kiri.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mostly, all the domains of learning directly or indirectly deal with alienation this is the reason why it has become the buzzword of the 20th century and the key content of Marxian communism. And literature, one of the organelles of learning and mirrors society, is never aloof from it. It has performed its duty unfeignedly. It has always been brimming with factors that cause alienation and affect both

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

the external and internal spheres of man's life. Although both spheres are collectively affected by these factors, it will be better to present them separately. Which, the former includes fellow mortals—be it flora or fauna or human beings; economy—be it of a country or the world; climate and weather—be it territorial or non-territorial; social issues—be it micro or macro; politics—be it of a particular region or a country or of beyond; and world-wide technology, etc., and the latter includes attitudes, education, learning, perception, abilities, beliefs, experiences, religions, values, traditions, cultures, and civilizations, etc... and as a whole, these factors can be put into four groups namely “personal biographical factors, psychological factors, environmental factors, and organizational factors” (Sujan / *tyonote.com*).

Observance on the horoscope of alienation reveals that it is the fruit of such social, economic, cultural, and psychological, factors that manifest one's life in those aspects that cause a sense of estrangement in one's mind and soul either from oneself, or from others or from the society in which one dwells. In broad sense, they may be put in a sole group that may be called the group of Socio-psychological factors—the reason behind putting these factors in such a group is their interconnection, e.g., the economic and the cultural factors are, directly or indirectly, part of such social factors that influence one in experiencing the trauma of continuum alienation spectrum—in which, the former (the factors of social spectrum) comprises family, wealth, religion, and society, etc., whereas the later (the factors of psychological spectrum), feelings, perceptions, motivations, learning, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and learning, etc. As a result, the condition of alienation takes birth at the very moment when one's mind and soul find inadequacy in relating to the world in which one dwells. This state of inadequacy only arises when the world, devoid of any expectations, ambiguously contradicts the efforts, ideas, dreams, goals, etc. that one has been trained to see as honourable, just, and moral. The dissonance between theory and practical, the superficiality of the knowledge, mobility of the truth, partiality of the existing trends of societies, double-dealing of the law and justice, shallowness of the religions, the pomp of the people, shrewdness of the leaders, cheating of the dear ones, pseudo-intellectual realities of the sphere, irrationality of the world and its agencies, and shattering of the dreams and aspirations etc., make one either rebel or a social animal with alienated soul. One begins to ponder over the questions of one's existence and essence to have as triumph as possible, if defeated, one either dies cowardly otherwise lives with an alienated soul. And if one lives, one cuts oneself off not only from one's society but also even from the one possesses. Being always with low integration, one begins to live in such utter or slight isolation that often occurs within one's parted selves, or

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

between two or more than two individuals, or between an individual and a group of homo sapiens of a community or society in which one dwells and works. Cultural values and social norms, the boon of society, become a curse for such one. In such a condition, whatever one inculcates from society—the existing culture and civilization—causes psychological upheavals that shake or shatter the ground on which one’s existence and essence depend. Such shaking or shattering gives birth to the alienation that naturally becomes obvious in one’s emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of life.

Defining Alienation

However, from time to time, lexicographers, theologians, psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers have tried their hands at defining it—alienation—in their ways. For theologians, alienation stands “for the turning of the soul from God (*Ephesians 2:12; Colossians 1:21, biblestudytools.com*) and for *Oxford World Encyclopedia*, it is a term in psychology that stands for “a feeling of estrangement and separation from other people. This definition is expanded upon in existential psychology to include the idea that being compelled to live up to social norms has caused one to feel cut off from their “true selves.” The sociological definition of alienation derives from the work of Hegel and Marx” (*oxfordreference.com*), and to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, it is “a withdrawing of separation of a person or person’s affectations from an object or position of former attachment” (*Merriam-webster.com*). Seeing the importance and seriousness of the term alienation, what the scholars Leonid M. Popov and Pavel N. Ustin jointly write in the article “Psychological Alienation Problem in Moral and Ethical Psychology of Personality”, can not be neglected. What they write clears the term by large. They write—

Alienation...is a category that is fully investigated in the framework of early philosophical studies of Hobbes, John Locke, B. Pascal, J.J. Rousseau, F. Schelling et al. (Shadrine, 2010). However, the current understanding of alienation is based on the works of F. Hegel (Hegel, 2008) and K. Marks (2010). In the works of Hegel, this phenomenon is synonymous with such ideas as contra-position and describes the breakup of the natural soul from spirit as the ideal substance. The mechanism of the alienation’s overcoming the author sees in cognition, which reveals the ideal nature of things, and thus stimulates the convergence of the soul with the universal Spirit. In the works of K. Marks, the alienation phenomenon is defined as the isolation of man from the process and products of work as a result of the sharing of labour and private ownership. He notes that capitalist labour as a form of exploitation and coercion, leads

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

to the opposition of individual creativity (generic nature) and employment. The result is deprivation of a person's ability to self-realization, and loss of one of its main characteristics—subjectivity. The understanding of alienation, according to the works of K. Marx, is the most traditional (p. 3).

Defining the concept of alienation, in his doctoral dissertation which was published as an article in *Psychological Review* in 1975 under the title “Towards a Psychological Theory of Alienation”, Daniel Stokols, a scholar from the University of California, writes—

The experience of alienation is conceptualized as a sequential-developmental process which (a) develops in the context of an ongoing relationship between an individual and another person or group of people; (b) involves an unexpected deterioration in the quality of outcome provided to the individual by the other (s); and (c) persists to the extent that the individual and the other (s) remain spatially or psychologically proximal (p. 26).

In the same dissertation, he (Daniel Stokols) writes—

In general, alienation has been conceptualized as a static phenomenon rather than a dynamic one. Historical and sociological analysis (e.g. Bell, 1960; Blauner, 1964; Durkheim, 1897/1951; Marx, 1844/1964; Merton, 1938; Simmel, 1902/1950; Weber, 1958) typically focus upon social-structural factors that appear to be linked to conditions of widespread alienation within society; for example, automation, anonymity, bureaucratization, and economic inequality. Psychological and philosophical analyses (e.g., Camus, 1956; Keniston, 1965; Kierkegaard, 1959; Sartre, 1953; Seeman, 1959) place a greater emphasis on the individual's experience and expression of alienation, but these conceptualizations also appear to be static ones (26).

Whatever the essence of alienation may be, one thing is certain: it is a dynamic phenomena rather than a static one. Daniel writes in the same doctorate dissertation: “Alienation is viewed either as a personality disposition or an *a priori* condition of human existence” (27). Since it is viewed as “a *a priori* condition of human existence” (27), there is a need to have a little peep into it based on the thoughts of existentialists. The history of alienation shows that it was Hegel who first let on (the concept of alienation) in the chapter “Self-Consciousness” of the philosophical book *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that, later on, became part of social philosophy. His thought about alienation

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

was, subsequently, succeeded by the philosophers of Marxism and Existentialism in different terms. In the context of the notion of alienation produced by Marx, Erich Fromm, a German social psychologist and psychoanalyst, writes that to him (alienation), means that-

Man does not experience himself as the acting agent in his grasp of the world, but that the world (nature, others, and he) remains alien to him. They stand above and against him as objects of his creations. Alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively as the subject separated from object (*Marx's Concept of Man* 1).

Here, the mesmerizing thing is that Marx has used it (alienation) in various ways, for instance as part of his historical and philosophical concerns, he has referred it to religion. To him “God...had usurped man’s position” (McLellan 106). The types of alienation that his works reveal can be grouped into four categories viz. “the alienation (i) of man from the products of his activity, (ii) of man from his productive activity itself (iii) of man from his human essence, and (iv) of man from other men” (Shakeba Jabeen Siddiqui 15). After Hegel and Marx, the unavoidable personality who has contributed a lot in the field of understanding alienation is Herbert Marcuse. He has described it in such a new stage in which the alienated soul (individual) is unknown to it. Even s/he does not recognize it. About his thought of alienation, as he said, the University of Regina (Uregina) writes that—

Alienation is the separation of human essence from the individual, either in psychology or material form. But when reality is identification of individuals with the organization imposed on them, and their selves are tied up in such identification, this is no longer the alienation described by Marx. That is, the supposedly alien is no longer outside and separated from the individual, but becomes part of the individual. As a result, there is no more false consciousness, whereby the objective interests of people differ from what they perceive to be their interests (Marcuse 11).

Historical Analysis of the Concept Alienation

Whether it is Hegel, Marx, Marcuse, or someone else, they all allude, either directly or indirectly, to the existence and essence of these people who have often experienced estrangement throughout history. Because alienation is a factor that impacts a person's existence and essence in every manner, it is impossible to ignore the ideas and theories of existentialists. This is because existentialism is not a philosophy that deals with one world and deals with the human condition, but rather with human

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

predicaments. For this reason, people constantly struggle to overcome existential crises, which are internal conflicts that include tension, anxiety, desperation, and alienation. According to Wikipedia—

Existential crises are inner conflicts characterized by the impression that life lacks meaning or by confusion about one's identity. Existential crises are accompanied by anxiety and stress, often to such a degree that they disturb one's normal functioning in everyday life and lead to depression. This negative attitude towards life and meaning reflects various positions characteristic of the philosophical movement known as existentialism... The various aspects associated with existential crises are sometimes divided into emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components (*en.m.wikipedia.org*).

Further, alienation, as referred to in the dictionary of existentialism, one of the major constituents that affect an individual's existence and essence, is related to an existential crisis. For being closely related to an existential crisis, alienation is often considered as its synonym. Though the term was formerly used to describe an individual's alienation from society and others in general, existentialism is now understood to represent the atomism of modern civilization. It should be observed that, while existentialists have defined and discussed it in various situations, the idea of isolation or separation—either from oneself or from the cultures and communities one lives in—remains the same. For instance, (1) Kierkegaard analysed it as the concept of anxiety that develops into despair and, eventually, leads to disease and death. According to him, the root cause of it (anxiety/alienation) is one's estrangement from God and over-reliance on the world. For (2) Sartre, it appears to be a feeling of vulnerability that often causes violence and oppression; for (3) Camus, it is associated with absurdity not of the world, not of the man, but of the 'world of man' that makes one alienated from one's self and one's society; and for (4) Simone de Beauvoir, it is grounded in one's nature that residues on the binary system betwixt the body-for-itself and body-in-itself—the kinship between the first and the second sex.

Therefore, based on the aforementioned thoughts and theories of the theologians, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers, it can be said that Alienation is universal and universal are its ways and preys. Like a scorpion, it has stung all mortals. It has left none. What to say about man, even the flora and fauna of this macrocosm are not spared from its stings. All, in different degrees, are crying with its poisonous sting. And human beings, its easy victims, have become puppets in its hands. It makes them. It mars them. It makes them weep. It makes them laugh. It makes them coward. It makes

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

them brave. It makes them Hamlet. It makes them Tess. It makes them Othello and Ophelia, the wrecked. It makes them Lear and J. Alfred Prufrock, the singer of modern love. It makes them Iago, devoid of a humane soul. It makes them doer of Sisyphean tasks and makes them cry in sibylline ways. It makes them Meursault, the stranger, and Gregor Samsa, the symbolizer of the futile life and capitalism. It does with all that it wants. Its generality gently recalls a quote from William Shakespeare's *The Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Lear and His Three Daughters* in which he writes: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport" (Act IV, Sc.i. Ins. 36-37, p. 930) and that can be replaced in a parody form like "As flies to the wanton boys are we to the alienation; / It kills us for its sport" (parodied form of Gloucester dialogue exerted from *King Lear*). It is to say that—

Alienation is most often represented in literature as the psychological isolation of an individual from society or community. In a volume of Bloom's *Literary Themes, Shakespeare's Hamlet* is described as the 'supreme literary portrait' of alienation, while noting that some may argue for Achilles in the *Iliad*. In addition, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* is introduced as a perfect example because so many senses of alienation are present. Other literary works described as dealing with the theme of alienation are *The Bell Jar*, *Black Boy*, *Brave New World*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Chosen*, *Dubliners*, *Othello*, *Fahrenheit*, *Invisible Man*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Notes from Underground*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Stranger*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Trail*, *The Castle*, *Waiting for Godot*, *the Wasteland*, and *Young Goodman Brown*. Contemporary British works noted for their perspective on alienation include *The Child in Time*, *London Fields*, *Trainspotting*, and *Regeneration* ("Social Alienation" [Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_alienation)).

Pan-Indian Literature and Kamala Das' Literary Landscape of Alienation

Certainly, Indian literary luminaries stand at the forefront, masterfully depicting the continuing conflicts of alienation that continue to unfold inside the psyche and souls of their people through their creative endeavours. Pan-Indian literature, be it of English or of any other Indian language, is brimming with the tense, sense, and temperament of alienation. For *instance*, the works chiefly of Munshi Prem Chand, Bhasham Sahani, Amarkant, Kamleshwar, Mohan Rakesh, Agyeya, Muktibodh, Rajendra Yadav, Nirmal Verma, and Mahashweta Devi in Hindi literature; the ghazals, nazms, and short stories of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Manto in Urdu literature; the works of Sundara Ramasamy and

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

Jayakanthan's in Tamil literature; the works of Viswanatha Satyanarayana and Sri Sri Satyanarayana's works in Telugu literature; the novels and philosophical works of S.L. Bhyrappa in Kannada literature have lots to do with alienation. In all this literature, it (alienation) is reflected as being caused by the societal, political, and economic paradoxes that possess ambiguity, duality, irony, and upheaval in its spectrum. The diversity of the Indian cultural and linguistic landscape contributes a lot to the variety of such perspectives on alienation in its literature that it has a good place and position in its existence. Indeed, the analysis of Indian English literature clearly demonstrates that feelings of alienation have, and will continue to have, a significant and permanent role in all historical periods. This claim is based on its repeated resurgence—much like the mythological phoenix—in the many social, cultural, and political spheres of India. Consequently, it (alienation) has been and will be a recurring theme in Indian English literature that, in its course, presents the sociocultural and political complexities of the Indian subcontinent and beyond, reflecting the sense of detachment, estrangement, and isolation of the individuals that they feel and experience in their cultural, familial, or societal surroundings. In Indian English writing, exemplary are the plays of Badal Sarkar, Girish Karnad, and Vijay Tendulkar; the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayana, Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Arun Joshi, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Meenakshi Mukherji; the poetic verses of Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, P.Lal, Mahapatra, Daruwalla, Ramanujan, Parthasarathi, Nandi, Gieve Patel, Agha Shahid, Jussawalla and many so others' that present the slashes of alienation beyond the diversity, reflecting socio-cultural and political complexities of the Indian subcontinent and beyond.

There is a need to be cleared that the alienation found in Kamala Das, as her works—be it prose or poetry, be it her autobiography or her autobiographical works—reflect, is the synthesis of most of (not all) the forms or types of alienation that the great minds have ever ascertained, felt up, and found out while going on the Sociocultural or Socio-psychological track of learning to have the heart pleasing sight of human life. Be it Carl Marx's four types of alienation—of man from the product of his activity, of man from his productive activity itself, of man from his human essence, and of man from other men—, or American sociologist Lewis Samuel Feuer's six kinds of alienation—of class society, of the competitive society, of industrial society, of mass society, of race, and generation; be it American social psychologist Melvin Seeman's five forms of alienation—powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement—or Tavis's two kinds of alienation—social alienation and self-alienation or the recently discovered alienation that include

parent, social, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and relationships related alienation, all have a basin like primitive existence to form the ocean of existence in her life that is reflected in her works.

Cause and Effect of Echoing Existential Alienation in Kamala Das

The alienation, found in the works of Kamala Das, the mother and lady Prometheus of modern Indian English poetry, is chiefly existential and is caused and effected by such unconditional persistence of Socio-cultural and Socio-psychological upheavals that she has felt and faced in her life. It has forced her delving deep into the existential themes, exploring the sense of purpose, meaning, and ethics of life for sound existence and essence in Brobdingnagian and diverse male-dominated landscape of India. She has repeatedly depicted it in her all works, and her depiction is not only caused by such social and psychological struggles that she has to face at the every stage of her life, alienating her from the traditional communities and its societies in which she dwelt but also from the self of her own that is the root, shoot, and fruit of her existence and essence. It affected her so badly that she began to feel isolation and separation in such a way that she distanced herself from her mundane life, from her family, and from her friends and colleagues. It did not come to an end here. It separated her from herself and made a lady with split personality, broken hopes, and lost desires. Her being seems to be inadequate to the world in which she lives with such endless whispers, cries, and sobs that come to an end with silence at last.

The existential alienation, as her autobiography and autobiographical works reveal, makes its place in her life like a cobweb every time it is removed. It seems to be an incessant condition of her mind and soul that finds its flow from the Socio-cultural and Socio-psychological spectrum of her society which is patriarchal at its core. Although she seems to be at odds with it, it has been a boon not only for herself but also for Indian English poetry and its readers. Had she not been existentially alienated, she would not have become such a good and great poet, and the world would never have such an 'aggressively individualistic' (11) poet(ess) who would have openly talked about the pains and pangs of the second sex that they have in the context of love, sex, and beyond. As gold shines only through the fire, her poetry shines only through the fire of alienation. What though she passes through the continuum of alienation that, in number, includes five meanings in the course and discourse of her life and includes meaninglessness, normlessness, powerlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement? It has made her "a female Prometheus, ... with a manifesto of desire that seeks to escape the paradox of being a prisoner of the hegemonic patriarchal discourse she despises" (17). It is hard to diagnose the

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

existential alienation in the life and works of the acclaimed Indo-Anglican poet Kamala Das without having a pellucid glimpse at her personal and professional life which can be known better through her autobiography *My Story* which is a momentous proclamation of her self-identity, resistance, and love with its all pains and pangs, together with the biographies, creative and critical books, and scholarly papers written on her. These books and papers are Janus-faced and have the power to look at and reflect both sides of the coin of her personal and professional life. Although her poetic regime is autobiographical and reflects her life well, her biography and autobiography are the primary sources of knowing her personal life. Existential alienation is a part of alienation that is a natural condition of all human beings. One and all passes through it. It is another thing that some come to know and some don't. Some have a mild effect and some have, a profound. In the context of Kamala Das, it seems to be immortal.3the moment she began to feel, she found it coiling in her mind and soul. It estranged her from her society and her spouse. The best Kamala is found in the worst alienation which is existential in approach. The alienation, found in her life as well in her works is existential alienation caused by the unconditional persistence of Socio-cultural and Socio-psychological upheavals in her life and delving deep into the existential themes while exploring the sense of purpose, meaning, and ethics of life for sound existence and essence mincing meaninglessness of life and its love, normlessness of its communities and societies, the powerlessness of the might of her soul, isolation as the best way, and Self-estrangement.

Das, like an existentialist, often tries to find out the real meaning, purpose, and ethics of her life for a sound, secure, and *bona fide* existence and essence, but when she senses the society in which she dwells is male-dominated, she becomes highly alienated. Her alienation pushes her to point blank. She seems to be unable to grasp what she should do and what she should not. It does not stop here. It shakes her beliefs in such a way that she finds it hard to believe anything to be right, true, and just. Being a quandary, she often feels her existence and essence at stake. The society in which she dwells does not provide her minimal standards for her existence and essence that gently need a clear meaning, a useful purpose, and good ethics for her dwelling besides clarity and certainty in making decisions and taking actions. She feels that lacks such an individualistic existence, freedom, and choice that can shape her essence. Such conditions of her life hint towards the thoughts of the existentialists who believe (1) that life is without any inherent or predetermined meaning, and that one must create one's meaning through one's choice and actions and on the other hand, (2) it (life) is inherently absurd, and that one must confront the inherent meaninglessness of existence. However, rather than despairing in

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

the face of this bitter truth of life and the world, she decides to face it at its angularities and eccentricities. In the poem “Composition”, she writes—

Ultimately,
 I have come face to face with the sea.
 In the beginning
 The sea was only the wind’s
 Ceaseless whisper
 But,...
 Quite often I thought
 That I could hear at night
 The surf breaking on the shore (25).

Shakespeare’s line “all that glitters is not gold” (Merchant of Venice, Act II, Sc. VII, p. 201) comes true in the context of Kamala’s consideration of life at its various contours. The life she dreamed of in her childhood proved to be quite different in the prime of her life and beyond. This world seems to be too much with her in Wordsworthian phraseology. Patriarchal domination of the world has utterly changed the meaning of life as she has assumed to adopt. It reiterately tried to disenfranchise her from her right to create meaning through her choices and action. The result was that she fell victim to existential alienation that chiefly caused her to engage in pondering over the meaning, purpose and value of her life. Her polyphonic poem “An Introduction” which is known for the photosynthesis of her identity reflects this existential triad—of meaning, purpose, and ethics of her life—very well. Her dictum-like lines—

I am Indian, very brown, born in
 Malabar, 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? The language I speak
 Becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
 All mine, mine alone (119).

—reflect not only her hankering after making impressions and expressions in the English language, but also the tense and sense of alienation that she gets from the social group in which she dwells, and that prevents her from defining her earnest, decent, and significant existence and essence in this

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

tongue. Additionally, the statement she makes in this context— “it is honest, / it is as human as I am human, don’t / you see” (119)?—indicates not only the nature of language and its authenticity but also the efforts she makes to attain her authenticity and the status “I” that in the terminology of the existentialists stands for “knowing one’s instinctual desires, being aware of one’s hidden wishes and of one’s genuine “Dionysian” character” (*pdnet.org*), and that makes her artefacts an “outcome of a struggle to relate her private experiences with the larger world outside—to maintain her identity”(R. Raphael 127). Undoubtedly, she knows her instinctual desires and to fulfil them she makes sound efforts, but her society checks her convincing her of her femininity about that she writes—

I was child, and later they
 Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
 Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair. When
 I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
 For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
 Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me
 But my sad woman body felt so beaten.
 The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank
 Pitifully (119).

The condition becomes so worse that she begins to follow Newton’s third law as she writes—

Then I wore a shirt and my
 Brother’s trousers cut my hair short and ignored
 My womanliness....
 Fit in, Oh,
 Belong, cried the categorizers (120).

She does not care about the traditional conditionality of her synchronous society. If she cares about anything that is her identity to what she wants to make in the narrow-minded world of her time. She shuns the Shakespearean phraseology “What is in name” (Romeo and Juliet Act II, Sc. II, p. 772). She finds lots in assuming name and this assumption seems near to the thought of the existentialists according to whom existence is e’er specific and individualistic and is basically the question of existence for which she often feels existential blues. This is why, she writes—

Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
 Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
 Choose a name, a role (120).

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

Attaining her authenticity in existential terminology, she wants to play an authentic role, but the society by which she abides once and again showers upon her in gratis such existential crises that it alienates her. She admonishes it saying “Don’t play pretending games” (120) with her for she too is a human being, not an object (to which Simone de Beauvoir calls Otherness) or property. In this context, she writes—

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).

Exploring the Nexus of Existential Alienation in Kamala Das' Literary Universe

The thing that alienates Kamala Das more, as her artefacts reveal, is the double-dealing of the society in which she was born and brought up. Its ambiguities, ironies, and trickeries synthetically give birth to duality in her psyche and soma this is why she is often seen in Hamletistic condition dwelling like a pendulum between the poles of “to be or not to be” (Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Act III, Sc. I). Its arbitrary nature, partial norms, and erroneous action stir her to think about her place and position in it. Whatever she feels and finds gives birth to existential alienation in her mind and soul. Its establishment of men as the subject, forgetting the individuality of the women folk, hurts her heart more and more. Her neglected childhood and her miserable married life do the worse. They arise in her the sense of loneliness, alienation and isolation in this worldly cosmos likewise making her feel her life without having any purpose or external meaning. It induces in her the sense of lacking freedom to such on a verge that she begins to dwindle of accepting and rejecting it. It’s they that make her question the very foundation of her life and its various societies with which she is to interact. She, like Simone de Beauvoir, seems to be convinced that biological differences do not make any difference between men and women, but it’s an existing cultural phenomenon that makes “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (*Second Sex* 295). Very early in her life, she comes to feel that the structural circumstances of society do so. She begins to think that they make the Shakespeares of the society “frailty, thy name is women” (Hamlet Act I, Sc.ii). To her, by large, as her works reflect, women folks themselves are largely responsible for their plight. Owing to their passivity to the thoughts and actions of the society,

they have to pass through the eroticism that also causes (existential) alienation in them and she being its part is no exception. This is the reason why in the poem “Summer in Calcutta”, she writes—

What is this drink but
 The April sun, squeezed
 Like an orange in
 My glass? I sip the
 Fire, I drink and drink
 Again, I am drunk,
 Yes but on the gold
 Of suns. What noble
 Venom flows through
 My veins and fills my
 My mind with unhurried
 Laughter? My worries
 Doze. Wee bubbles ring
 My glass, like a bride’s
 Nervous smile, and meet
 My lips (55).

Singularity Disguised as Plurality

There is a need to clear that in Kamala Das’ dictionary ‘I-me-my-mine’ gently turns into ‘we-us-our-ours’. The reason behind such conversion is the fact that what she bears and feels are borne and felt by other beings of her biological race. She gives her singularity such a magical touch that it goes beyond the perception of common readers. They are unable to know easily when and how it takes the universal form. When the envoi of her poems is over, they come to feel this poetic magic of her plurality that ever resides in her singularity in the same way as the soul resides behind the ribs. In this case, appearance is deceiving in her poetry. Her existence finds its essence in their existence and essence. Without them, she is none and nothing. It’s the blending of singularity in plurality and plurality in the singularity that gives a magical strength to the magical poetic tower of this magician, and this is why she often weaves her nest poetic tower from such straws of the singularity of “I” that, later on, gently turns it into the poetic tower lashed with the plurality of “we”. Her magic of ‘I’ and ‘We’ reminds one of Helene Cixous’s *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) in which, declaring the mission of her writing, she says—

I shall speak about women's writing; about what it will do. Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reason, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text—as into the world and into the history—by her own movement (875).

It's to say that like Helene Cixous, candid Kamala Das has always been with the mission of putting herself into the poetic text and this 'herself' of her has a universal appeal that presents the self of the women folks of the Indian world. The self-felt plight of her biological race disturbs the poise and passivity of her mind and soul. It forces her to come out of such a deceptive comfort zone that is not only partial and patriarchal but also tricky and illusionary.

Double-dealing of the Society

Double dealing of the society as she sees and feels not only makes her alienated soul desolately deviate from her society and dear ones but also forces her to make a double commitment—first to herself and second to the selves of her biological race. About these commitments, K. Satchidanandan in the opening chapter (“Transcending The Body”) of the book *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* writes—

This double commitment—to the self and others—is what defines Kamala's poetics of complementarity and lends to her creative universe a comprehensiveness seldom encountered in the stereotypical feminist poetry of the 70s and 80's with its oppressively repetitive concern with the body, its deliberate and aggressive anti-male stance and its jargonised confessional or indignant idiom (17).

Such commitments (as Satchidanandan writes) continuously make Das restless in such a way to stir her such prowesses that stir her to indite such lines—

If only the
 Human eye could look beyond the
 Chilling flesh, the funeral pyre's
 Rapid repast and then beyond
 The mourner's vanquished stance, where would
 Death then, that meaningless word
 When life is all that there is, that
 Raging continuity that
 Often the wise ones recognize as God (*Anamalai Poems*, IV, pp 16-17)?

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

—that reflect not only her feeling of death in life but also of the rest women folks' who have the same feeling in the form of such disguised blessings that oftentimes cause the tense and sense of such alienation that is showered upon them by the androcentric society in which they completely and utterly dwell with loneliness. Owing to this self-felt loneliness, in the poem "Anamalai Hills", she writes: "I was alone, I am alone, I will be alone...(58)." It is another thing that this utterance is made in the context of the mountain's loneliness, yet its surge is from her psyche that has seen and felt loneliness destined with women folk.

Parental Alienation

No less than the double-dealing of society, the lack of her parents' proper care and affection affected Kamala Das' life a lot. It became such a syndrome for her that in modern terminology is called parental alienation. It gave birth to such hostility towards her parents in her mind and soul that she could never come out. What a tributary does for a main-stem, it did for her in her hard times. As a tributary contributes a lot in flooding the main stem in the rainy season, so has it become in the flowing current of alienation throughout her life. Her works are brimming with several instances where she is found delving deep into complex familial dynamics, including strained relationships with parents and spouses. The records reveal that her mother Nalapat Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poet, and her father V.M. Nair, an automobile company executive and a journalist, have no proper time for their issues due to which their issues, especially she (Das), have to fall victim of (parental) alienation to that her sensitive soul, like a barometer feels and poetically reflects on the face dial of her literary creations indirectly. Generally, it is said that she has a good bond with her mother, but her interview with Shilpi Saxena shuns this myth, for example—

SS. How far your poetic sensibility share the poetic creed and vision of your mother's poetry?

KD. My mother is certainly a great poet. She is still alive. But she never inspired me. There was a great distance between us. It was the circumstances that made me poet ("*Love is My Only Religion: An Interview with Kamala Das*" / impressions.org.in).

Although alienation due to parenting has no point-blank culmination in her works, its indirect existence cannot be neglected. No doubt, she (Das) inherited writing from her mother, and no doubt

her mother had no proper time for her, what love she found in her life after the love showered on her by her grandmother is of her mother yet her absence distressed her child's mind. Her sensitive heart often feels a crusty crack for it. This is why in her autobiography she writes—

Since my mother did was write, I emulated her...But having watched mother, grandmother, great grandmother, great-aunt suffer with a silence that did not protect them at all, I determined to write honestly. All the pain unexpressed and all the sad stories left untold made me write recklessly and in protest (My Story 25).

She does not take a rest for a while. What she feels, she ironically presents in the poem “My Mother at Sixty-Six”. It is nothing but the x-ray report of her (mother-daughter) relationship. What she writes—

Driving from my parent's home
 To Cochin last Friday
 Morning, I saw my mother
 Beside me,
 Doze, open-mouthed, her face
 Ashen like that
 Of a corpse and realised with
 Pain
 That she was as old as she
 Looked but soon
 Put that thought away, and
 Looked out at young
 Trees sprinting, the merry children spilling
 Out of their homes, but after the airport's
 Security check, standing a few yards
 Away, I looked again at her, wan
 Pale
 As a late winter's moon and felt that
 Old
 Familiar ache, my childhood's fear,
 But all I said was, see you soon,
 Amma,
 All I did was smile and smile and
 Smile....
 Although, this poem rotates (90-91).

—becomes the last nail in her poetry. No less than her mother's poetic activity, her father's hectic profession and conservative nature affect the raga and saga of her life. It causes such hostility toward him that she often refers to him as cold, oppressor, dictator, sole instructor, and autocratic in her works

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

and interviews as well, but in her poem “A Requiem for My Father”, she presents her mixed feelings for him. Although she tries to show her love for him, her alienated soul makes her write the truth and she writes—“we were tongue-tied, humbled and quiet/Although within we wept for you/And more for ourselves, now without a guardian” (143).

The autobiographical elements found in her opuses oftentimes reveal that she has turbulent relationships within her family and in such circumstances she is to fulfil such social expectations that are imposed upon her as a woman that seems hard to come to terms with for her. In her memoir *My Story*, for example, she (Das) candidly expresses her tumultuous relationships with her parents, particularly her father, who was domineering and controlling. Her struggle for autonomy and self-expression in the face of familial pressures can be seen as a form of resistance against the forces of parental influence. Although this may not be fit for the conventional definition of parental alienation for reflecting the broader theme of discord and its impact on individual identity, her exploration of gender roles and social expectations in her poetry and prose can shed light on how familial dynamics contribute to the alienation of individuals, especially women, from their sense of self and agency. Challenging the patriarchal norms, interrogating the power dynamics within familial relationships, and offering insights into how parental influence can shape and sometimes distort one’s sense of identity, her writings often open the hidden bitter truth of the society in which she dwells. This challenging norm of the society, this interrogation of the power dynamics, and this offering way of the parental influence made her a rebel with such a low expectancy that was to be a beacon for the posterity of her gender and race. In the words of Thomas Frank Dooley, a researcher, it “might be expressed as a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes of behaviour can be made”(9). It’s another thing that she does not directly address the concept of parental alienation in her works, her writings provide rich material for exploring the themes of familial conflict, gender power dynamics, and the struggle for autonomy and self-definition in the face of societal pressures. These themes find such a whispering resonance in her poetic rivulet that is far heard and felt in leisure seeming to be destined not only for her but also for all those women folks whose pluralities she represents through her singularity mapping all that long silence that they get in the bonding of their dear ones in the long stony journey of their life. Her poems especially “Too Late for Making Up”, “My Father’s Death”, “Next to Indira Gandhi”, and “A Requiem for My Father” present such a bond that has both bitter and sweet memories between her and her father. These poems reflect all the shades of the daughter-father

relationship. Based on these poems, it can be said that what type of love Cordelia had for her father King Lear, she had for her father V.M. Nair. In the poem “My Father’s Death”, she pens—

Only the insincere shed tears
 At my father’s death, those who came
 To get photographed with corpse...
 Only those who lost their yearly
 Baksheesh wept at my father’s death.
 He was generous with money
 As generous as I was with
 Love. There was a cloud of tension
 Between him and me...
 Only in coma
 Did he seem close to me, and I
 Loved him although I was bad, a bad daughter, a writer of tales that
 Hurt, but in the task of loving
 The bad ones were the ablest, yes
 You should have hugged me, father (“My Father’s Death” p. 146).

—and tries to prove that her love for him was not for show, not for *Bakhsheesh*, and not for photography. It was conditionally genuine. Her next iconic poem “Next to Indira Gandhi” witnesses that it was the lack of his father’s love for her that made her rebellious by nature. This is why, she writes—

Did you want me?
 Did you ever want a daughter?
 Did I disappoint you much?
 With my skin as dark as yours
 You are dead, nobody fears you now...(p. 148).

Although she has bitter memories with her father, she was not without sweet love and respect for him due in the poem “A Requiem for My Father” she writes—

I would have gladly changed places with you, father.
 I was never afraid to die,
 From childhood to middle years I have had a raw deal,
 Illness, and loneliness, loves that faded like mist,
 And the elders’ irrational hate

 And that someone rejoiced to hear me cry
 I loved you father, I loved you all my life....(P.144-145).

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

Kamala Das' Nuptial life and alienation

In Kamala's life, alienation does not come at a single stage, but at all. Not only her childhood, not only her prime of life, but also her old days were sacrificed on the altar of alienation. In the days of her earlier life, her parents' busy schedule; in the days of her prime, her husband's traditionality; and in the days of her old age, her sons' negligence alienated her. Universally, of minor importance are the days of nonage and dotage. They are neglected, pardoned, and finally forgotten. Of major importance are the days of prime. It historicises the existence and essence of an individual. It's never neglected. Never pardoned. Never forgotten. The prime of Das' life that makes her history iconic with her thoughts and theories existing in her works is infested with isolation, separation, and alienation. Her works reveal that she was bereaved from all such instincts that seniority demands. In the name of love, she was raped; in the name of freedom, she was enslaved; in the name of hope, happiness, and promise, she was given despair, sorrow, and denial. Her poems chiefly "An Introduction", "The Sunshine Cat", and "The Old Playhouse", describe her married life well. Her condition was like red mushrooms (as she pens in the poem "The Fear of the Year") "stilled, and silenced, and dead, dead, dead" (87). In another poem titled "A Man A Season", presenting her husband's negligence, obscurity, passivity, and betrayal in nuptial life, she inscribes—

A man is a season
 You are eternity,
 To teach me this you let me toss my youth like coins
 Into various hands, you let me mate with shadows,
 You let me sing in empty shrines, you let your wife
 Seek ecstasy in others' arms (81).

She does not stop here. She blames that her love-life was one sided. For example, in the poem "An Introduction", she composes—

It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
 And then feel shame, it is I, dying
 With a rattle in my throat (120).

It's to say that neither her parents nor her husband nor her lovers, and even nor her sons gave her true love for that she was ceaselessly pining. What they showered upon her was nothing else, but alienation that came to her continually in different forms.

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

Self-Alignment

Kamala Das is not only the victim of such alienation that is caused by the lack of proper love and care of her parents and husband(s) but also of such alienation caused by such feelings and emotions that shook her existence and essence. She is the victim of existential alienation that refers to her estrangement from not only the traditional community in which she dwelt but also to the self that she possesses. She seems to be alienated from self or self-estrangement. What Karl Marx, the German philosopher and economist and Karen Horney, a German psychoanalyst and Karl Marx, write about self-estrangement or alienation from the self is quite applicable in her (Das') context. According to the former (Marx), self-estrangement is "the alienation of man's essence, man's loss of objectivity and his loss of realness as self-discovery, manifestation of his nature, objectification and realization" (*en.m.wikipedia.org*) and according to the latter (Horney) one whose "spontaneous individual self (has been) stunted, warped or choked, ... is said to be in a condition of alienation from self (71)", and here, she (Das) is found essentially alienated—, as her works reveal. Her will is found stunted and her ways warped. Because of the net of patriarchy, she is not free to do what she likes. She is not free to achieve the destination that she wants to achieve. The free development of her mind and soul is checked at every step. Every moment, she, like Rousseau feels that (wo)"man is born free and everywhere" (s)"he is in chains" (*www.oxfordreferences.com*) The result is existential alienation that is the part and parcel of alienation as a whole and that is counted as the alienation from the self and the society. This type of alienation thematically dominates her works due to her alienated poetic self made her write such lines that are pent up with loneliness. She writes "I am a writer, and in their eyes a dangerous freak, a flightless bird that employs its wings only in its dreams. I am the one on whom garlands fade, such is the heat of my loneliness" (*ir.nbu.ac.in*).

Alienation Related to Existence, Identity, and Search for Meaning of Life

End-to-end her works delve deep into reflecting such complexities of human existence, identity, and the search for meaning that often make her readers feel her sense of loneliness, alienation, isolation, meaninglessness, powerlessness, and normlessness of such a society that often alienates her and made her female or feminine self feel deadly stranded in the trap of such male-dominated society that used to destined the women folks like her sometimes in the disguise of father and sometimes in brother and husband. These cloaked males killed their will and captivated their souls in such a way that it seemed impossible for them to resurrect. Through her pen, she tries to resurrect not only the self she possesses

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

but also the others that they possess. This resurrection needs identity and meaning of their existence and essence for that she is seen subjectively making efforts throughout her works. Her quest for identity, authenticity, and belonging finds a sound place in her poems especially in “An Introduction” and “The Old Playhouse”. In the former poem, her repetitive use of “I” presents her sense of identity creation for she pines endlessly and at last, creates her identity with the words that she writes—

I am Indian, very brown, born in
 Malabar, I speak three languages, write in
 Two, dream in one (119).

She does not stop here. She shrinks all those who raise questions at the language of her passion and profession. She, in the same poem, writes—

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?

 Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
 Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
 Choose a name, a role (pp. 119/120).

Undoubtedly, she chose her language and made her name, i.e., her identity, but the authenticity she wanted was continuously checked by her husband. This is why, being alienated, in the poem “The Old Playhouse”, she writes—

You called me wife,
 I was taught to break saccharine into your tea and
 To offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering
 Beneath your monstrous ego, I ate the magic loaf and
 Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
 Questions I mumbled incoherent replies (38).

The study of these lines reflects itself that their words are not the effect of such mind that ever remains in peace, but of such mind that ever remains busy in battle within and battle outside. These words are the cream of the cope of such an alienated soul that ever craves the gems of existentialism—identity,

meaning, authenticity, and freedom, rejecting “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 (21)”. What she wants chiefly is freedom for it provides identity, meaning, and authenticity in its ways. She wants not it (freedom) for doing a deed or performing a duty, but for realizing her will that depends on choices in existential terminology. In its context, Sartre's lines can't be neglected. He says—

Every philosophy that subordinates the human to something other than man, whether it be existentialist idealism or Marxism, has as its foundation and consequence a hatred of man: History has proved it in both instances. We have to make a choice: Man is either first himself or first Other than himself. If one opts for the second alternative one is quite simply a victim and accomplice of real alienation. But alienation does not exist unless man is first of all action, it is freedom which finds servitude (*Sartre* 84).

It—‘ first herself’ rather than ‘other than herself’— is the knot of her all problems. She wants herself first, but the patriarchy wants her to be other than herself. She despises ‘Othering’. She does not want to be the second sex in the society. She wants to be the first sex or subject of the society in which she lives. This was the main reason for alienation that housed in her soul and made her write such lines that questioned all such norms that existed in her so-called normalized society. She writes—

Who are you, I ask each and every one,
 The answer is, it is I. anywhere and
 Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself
 I; in this world, he is tightly packed like the
 Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
 Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
 It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
 And then feel shame, it is I, dying
 With a rattle in my throat. I am a sinner,
 I am a saint. I am the beloved and the
 Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
 Aches which are not yours. I too calls myself I (“An Introduction” 120).

Alienation: A Result of Slanted Power Distribution and Biased Norms of the Existing Society

To her, as her works reflect, all the societies of this civilized world are without impartial power distribution and sound norms. There is a smell of treachery and selfishness in the norms of every

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

society. In every span of her life, she finds nothing but cheating due to which she seems to fall victim to existential nausea that demonstrates such amorality of the universe in which she as a woman is destined to become a victim. Her sense of existential nausea is expressed well in her poem “Captive” in which she writes—

My love is an empty gift, a gilded
 Empty container, good for show, nothing
 Else. The last one was a mere child, you should
 Have seen him cry! Wild was his weeping and
 My heart, rejoicing, cried, goodbye, goodbye
 To that stagnant lie, so long, so long, sweet
 Slavery. But friend, be silent: let my
 Secret nest in you, it's not time yet
 To end the game (113).

Alienation Causing the Tense and Sense of Suicide and Death

Having been the victim of existential nausea that was the result of the amorality of the universal societies—their deceitful partial norms, their hollowed love, and their double-dealing—, she tries to have a solace in suicide and death. Few can check the mobility of mind and she was no exception. Her mind and soul seem to have a bending towards them, but she was no coward. She embraced her pen and wrote poems that show her inclination towards death and suicide. Her poems chiefly “Life’s Obscure Parallel” and “The Suicide” illustrate her heart well. In the first poem, she writes—

Life’s obscure parallel is death. Quite often
 I wonder if what I seem to do is living
 Or dying. A little of each is in every
 Gesture, both my mind’s and my body’s. inside
 My throat the inward breath combats the outside
 But within (“Life’s Obscure Parallel” 104).

As she was moving like a pendulum between the two poles of the conditional worldly truth—birth and death—, she found the equal. She seems not to fear death for having to face life in death and death in life. This is the reason, she writes—

Bereft of soul
 My body shall be bare.
 Bereft of body

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

My soul shall be bare.

 I tell you, sea.
 I have enough courage to die
 But not enough.
 Not enough to disobey him
 Who said, do not die
 And hurt me that certain way.

 Bereft of body
 My soul shall be free.
 Take in my naked soul
 That he knew how to hurt
 Only the soul knew how to sing
 At the vortex of the sea ("The Suicide" 110).

Alienation: The Harbinger of Spirituality in Das' life

Das was not so cowardly to commit suicide in alienation. She was an absurd lady. And an absurd lady never commits suicide. The days, good or bad, came and went in her life and she, being a lady with great courage and intellect never took a wrong step. She tried to have the peace of mind and the calm of heart in religion—God. Although, in the earlier phases of her life, she had no charm for religion and its God. What she had was nothing but physical love in all its existing facets and forms. The betrayal of love that she got from her parents, her spouse, and her issues and their societies gently led her towards India's age-long wisdom of saints and sages. The mystical and spiritual charm of the country attracted her. In it, she started to explore her inner self—soul. Undoubtedly, in her works, she mentions her physical contact with different men, underlying is, in such mentions, her yearning to become one as the philosophy of *Advaita* teaches. Her Krishnite poetry ("Vrindavan", "Ghanashyam", "Radha", "Radha Krishna", and "Lines Address to Devadasi") is the result of such existential alienation that she got in gratis from the society of her origin. Although, in her autobiography, she writes—

I have always thought of Krishna as my mate. When I was a child I used to regard him as my only friend, when I became an adult I thought of him as my lover. It was only by imagining that he was with me that I could lie beneath my husband to give pleasure... We do not have him physically to love us; we have to worship a bodiless one (*My Story* 20).

Although in her poem “Radha”, she writes—

The long waiting
 Had made their bond so chaste, and all the doubting
 And the reasoning
 So that in his first true embrace, she was girl
 And virgin crying
 Everything in me
 Is melting, even the hardness at the core
 O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting
 Nothing remains but
 You (77).

—, for some, her this utterance may be a Shakespearean proverb that says that “the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose” (*Merchant Of Venice*, Act 1, Sc. 3). Whatever it is, but one thing is clear that her alienated soul did not get solace in *Satanism* and, consequently, she adopted *Islam*. Although she embarrassed it with great charm and enthusiasm, what she found in it was heartbreak and regret due to which she said that “God has no connection with any religion” (www.livemint.com) and “But now I feel one should not change one’s religion” (Quora.com).

Conclusion

To wind up, it’s to say that the alienation found in Kamala Das is existential and it rotates around the last two out of the four categories of Marxian alienation in which the first is the alienation of man from his essence and the second, of man from other men; Feuer’s alienation of Class, mass, race, society, and of generation; Melvin’s alienation—powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement; Tavis’s social alienation and self-alienation; and the recently discovered alienation that include parent, social, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and relationships related alienation to make her existence and essence. There is a confluence mostly of all the types of alienation, in her works, that the thinkers ever produced. Her works are ever ready for testing. One and all can test for satisfaction. But the result, that will be found, will ever be existential alienation wrapped in the robes of Kierkegaard’s ‘notion of anxiety’, Sartre’s ‘feeling of vulnerability’, Camus’ ‘world of man’, and De Beauvoir’s ‘one’s nature residues on the binary system betwixt the body-for-itself and body-in-itself’. The simple reason behind it’s that her poetry is nothing but the poetry of (her) existence and essence for which she lived and died, for which she rebelled against the existing

society, for which she left her dear ones, and for which she changed her creeds and religion. Overall, she seems to be such a poet who in alienation composed the alienated poetry of her existence and essence for the age-long alienated world. In the words of S. J. Siddiqui—

It would be difficult to pick out any one definition that fits the human conditions that Kamala Das portrayed in her poetry. However, a close reading of her poems revealed an urgent and strong wish for death. When she looked back to her past, she realized that her life had been spent yearning for a dream that never came true. Her autobiography witnessed her keen consciousness of the futility of her existence. She had failures in almost all her relationships including her marriage, and her extra-material relationships. She had nothing to look forward to, except the depressing old age. She found herself in a state of alienation and desired to withdraw from all the activities and interactions. The lust, she flaunted is the only face to hide her pain, agony and loneliness (Siddiqui 16).

Works Cited

1. Cixous, Helene. *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Trans. And ed. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. The University of Chicago Press. 1987.
2. Das, Kamala. *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing: Selection from Kamala Das*. D C Books, 2007.
3. Das, Kamala. "My Mother at Sixty-Six". <https://ncert.nic.in/ncerts/1/lefl1111.pdf>.
4. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Translated and edited by H.M. Parshley. Penguin, 1974.
5. Dooley, Thomas Frank. "A Study of the Measurement of a Continuum of Alienation/Integration in Terms of Its Five Alternate Meanings as These are Related to Selected Sociological Factors". A Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University Milwaukee, Wisconsin. June 1971.
6. Fromm, Erich. "Alienation". *Marx's Concept of Man*. Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1961.
7. Orr, James. "Alinate - Bible Definition". *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'ALINATE' International Bible Encyclopedia" 1915.
8. McLellan, David. *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought*. Macmillan, 1973. HX39.5 M26 1973.
9. Popov, Leonid M. and Pavel N. Ustin. "Psychological Alienation Problem in Moral and Ethical

10. Psychology of Personality”. *IEJME—Mathematics Education*, vol. 11, no. 4, 787-797, 2016, p. 3.
11. Raphael, R. “Kamala Das: The Pity of It”. *Indian Literature*, vol. 22, No.3, May-June 1979,p.127. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23329993>. Accessed 29 Dec. 2023.
12. Saleem, Abdul. “Theme of Alienation in Modern Literature”. *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol. 2, no 3, 2014, p.71.
13. Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, quoted in Chiodi, P. (1976) *Sartre and Marxism*.
14. London: Harvester Press, 84.
15. Siddiqui, Shakeba Jabeen. “Alienation and Existential Crisis in the Poetry of Kamala Das”. *IJARW*, vol. 3, Issue 1, July 2021, p. 15, www.ijarw.com.
16. Shakespeare, William. “King Lear”. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Edited by W.J. Craig. Magpie Books, 1992.
17. Shakespeare, William. “Merchant of Venice”. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Edited by W.J. Craig. Magpie Books, 1992.
18. Shakespeare, William. “Romeo and Juliet”.*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Edited by W.J. Craig. Magpie Books, 1992.
19. Stokols, Daniel. “Towards a Psychological Theory of Alienation”. *Psychological Review*, vol. 82, no. 1, 1975, pp. 26-27.
20. Sujan. “What is Individual Behaviour? Definition and factors influencing”. *Tyonote*. https://tyonote.com/individual_behavior. Accessed on 15 Dec. 2023.

Web Sources

1. “Alienation”. *Oxford World Encyclopedia*. First Edition. 2004. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/search?btog=chap&q0=Alienation+>. Accessed on 15 Dec. 2023.
2. “Alienation”. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alienation>. Accessed on 15 Dec. 2023.
3. “Existential Crisis”. *Wikipedia*,https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existential_crisis. Accessed on 15 March 2024.

Author Name: Dr. Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr. Reshu Shukla

Acceptance Date: 16.05.2024

Publication Date: 28.05.2024

4. “Social Alienation” *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_alienation. Accessed on 15 Dec.
5. 2023.
6. Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man*. Beacon Press, 1964, <https://uregina.ca/~ginrich/319j2706.htm#:~:text=Alienation.,in%20psychologyal%20or%20material%20form>.
7. Self-estrangement - *Wikipedia*, <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-estrangement>. Accessed on 10 March 2024.
8. Golomb, Jacob. “Nietzsche on Authenticity”. *Philosophy Today*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1990,p. 244. USA, https://www.pdcnet.org/collection-anonymous/pdf2image?pdfname=philtoday_1990_0034_0003_0243_0258.pdf&file_type=pdf#:~:text=This%20means%20knowing%20one's%20own,well%Dfunctioning%20and%health%20manner. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday199034314>. Accessed on 20 February 2024.
9. Ratcliffe, Susan. *Oxford Essential Quotations*. Oxford University Press. 2016. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00008969#:~:text=jean%2DJacques%20Rousseau%201712%E2%80%939378&text=The%20social%20contract.&text=Man%20was%20born%20free%2C%20and%20everywhere%20he%20is%20in%20chains>.
10. Alienation and the Search for Love. https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/1137/8/08_chapter_04.pdf. Accessed on 10 January 2024.
11. Saxena, Shilpi. “Love is My Only Religion: An Interview with Kamala Das”. *Impressions: An International Refereed e-Journal of English Studies*, vol. 1, issue 2, 2007, p. 2 <http://impressions.org.in/shilpis>. Accessed on 15 December 2024.
12. Das, Kamala. *My Story*. Harper Collins, 2009.
13. Nair, Vijay. “Kamala Das: A Life in Verse”. *Mint*. <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/kBRAX401eBp2dzwL7daReM/kamala-Das-a-life-in-verse.html?facet=amp>. Accessed on 12 March 2024.