

Frank Confessions and Expression of Social Reality in *My Story* by Kamala Das

M. Nithya,

M. Phil Scholar,

Department of English, Bharathiyar Arts and Science College for Women, Attur

Abstract:

Kamala Das was noted for her many Malayalam short stories as well as many poems written in English. It is well-known that Kamala Das has succeeded in her aim to reveal her covered secrets to the readers. In *My Story*, Kamala Das tells her personal experiences including her growth into womanhood, her unsuccessful quest for love in and outside marriage, and her living in matriarchal rural South India after inheriting her ancestral home. Das talks about the domestic details of food, familial relations, marriage, childbirth, sexual liaisons, and the internal and external struggles of one woman in a repressive world. Her autobiography can be read as a critique of the victimization of women in a patriarchal society. She realizes the powerlessness of the female body and she believes that for the victimized women in a patriarchal society, sexuality not only makes her vulnerable physically but also makes her vulnerable emotionally and spiritually.

Keywords: feminism, victim, tradition, inequalities and social oppression.

Kamala Das has shown her female subjects make an efforts to change the notions of what is female or feminine in Indian tradition. Das' struggles shows us that life is much harder for the Third World women than men because they are doubly colonized; first, under the rule of colonial power, second by their own male dominated societies. Indian women suffer because of inequalities and social oppression. She has depicted a heart wrenching account of the brown children discriminated in a European school. Generally, in autobiographies that are written by women, the central theme is the relationship between the author and her mother. However, Kamala Das does not prefers to talk about her relation with her mother. It seems that she does this intentionally Das focuses on third world women's oppression and she puts her relations with men to the centre of her story.

Kamala Das describes her first sexual intercourse with her husband as an unsuccessful rape. She suffers through her husband's selfishness and neglect of her emotional and physical needs. After the birth of

second son, at the age of twenty, she has a nervous breakdown while she and her husband attempt a reconciliation after an early separation. Here, it is seen clearly that Kamala Das criticizes Indian marriage as patriarchal oppression.

As the emphasis on demystifying the myth of the female and generating a new role for the woman in society became popular and more women writing began appear in public. The feeling of social responsibility in reconstructing her social role gave the woman writer courage and confidence. The very qualities of forthrightness and expressiveness which would have been lauded in a male writer who had attempted to define female space becomes different and unsure of her intrinsic worth. The very qualities of forthrightness and expressiveness which would have been lauded in a male writer who had attempted to define female space becomes different and unsure of her intrinsic worth.

The tone of sincerity and the open confession of creative fulfillment in the writer's word underscore my point. The female autobiographic is viewed a radical and subversive when she writes the self and hence the diffidence and confusion that attends women's writing. A decentring of patriarchal power structures and reordering of the language of hierarchy to include the marginalized categories of experience is what the woman writer tries to achieve. In all this discussion of the common female experience, what one tends to overlook is the world could relate experiences, disgrace and abuse – what cannot be overlooked is the innate individually and uniqueness of every person's experience.

Her autobiography provides a succinct account of the changing social conditions within the narrow purview of her own tharavad, the Nalapat House. In the process of writing, the self in this work, the poet, herself a victim of colonial depredation, repeatedly resorts to a sort of idealized representation of her tharavad. Notwithstanding the fact that there is a certain, degree blurring of vision due to the confusion between actual social reality and the poet's idealization of the past, this text provides valuable information about the position of the woman in the Nayartharavad.

The woman in a Nayartharavad is projected as a much respected member of a society that gives her so much economic consideration. She has the freedom to come and go as she pleases or wander around the countryside and even to choose her husband. She explains the circumstances that led to the wedding of her fifteen-years old ancestress Kunji, "an aristocrat was to be shown to her at Cochin who was to marry her if she liked his face and if her uncles approved of his deportment" (12).

Kamala Das' description of her granduncle's mother Madhaviamma illustrates the consequences of this position. Her Valiamma is viewed as an unhappy person with a great capacity for silence. Kamala reconstructs this person's life story from sketchy details gleaned from the reports of various relatives. One can see how the pathetic situation described offers a genuine insight into the helplessness of a woman in the matrilineal framework of the Nayar tharavad, where the authority of the patriarch or Karanavan was final. He was a dictator of sorts, who was expected to look after the basic requirements like food, shelter, occasional feasts and other forms of entertainment of his siblings and their offspring. In return, the womenfolk pledged their allegiance to him, accepting his word as final; subverting all contrary pictures of him and idolizing his figure.

All women were educated and could express their thoughts and emotions without restraint if they chose to. By the time the author goes forward in time to her own life, we know that education for women, despite the break-up of matriliney, had come to be accepted as the natural course. As a consequence, they were able to freely express themselves, writing down their emotional inclinations and frustrations. But they rarely went to the extent of publicly declaring their sexual exploits or speaking openly about the shortcomings of life within their tharavad. Kamala's forthright confession became an embarrassment to her family and friends in Kerala as she herself admits in the preface to the autobiography. With the frank and uninhibited handling of feminine desire, the novel had already created a sensation in Kerala when it was serialized in the popular weekly *Malayalanadu*, literally shaking up the prudish Malayali reading community used to shoving under the carpet all matters relating to physical intimacy.

The novel expresses the identity and distinction both as a woman and a writer. Her other works are good but her autobiography is certainly better, it is written in the form of a novel, well-designed, informative and delightful autobiography. It can be read as a confession. Of course there was a minority, mostly women sentenced to patriarchal oppression and unable to find a way out of its asphyxiating labyrinths, who could identify themselves with the sad, lonely and ever-experimenting protagonist of *My Story* in her desperate search for true and lasting love.

My Story shows a rare type of vigour, strength, dedication and revelation of her true self quite successfully. Her boldness cannot be missed by anybody. The ability of Das to tell the truth is certainly very different than other autobiographers. She walks in the pages as a charming and superior woman whose beauty, knowledge and rarity cannot be missed. Only the puritans and narrow-minded persons can have some problems in appreciating her autobiography. If an autobiography cannot reveal the truth and moves around

falsehood then why should the readers waste time on that? An autobiography is bound to writing in a confessional mode and *My Story* is definitely in a confessional mode and reads like a pages of Diary.

Works Cited

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