

Victimization of Women in the Autobiography of Kamala Das' *My Story*

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Abstract

Women autobiographies contribute to the revitalization of the genre of Autobiography. Women's autobiography has been a record of self discovery. It is about subjectivity, women's subordinate social status, traditional norms and patriarchy that has curtailed women's liberty. Until nineteenth Century women autobiographies lack an authoritative voice to speak. They could speak only of family or religion, but with the access to Western Education women in twentieth century started expressing boldly about social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. Kamala Das is a renowned Indian writer who has written in Malayalam and English. Kamala Das' autobiography, *My Story* is an inward journey to re-assert her self in the patriarchal society in self confession. She has explored her inner conscious of her femininity. She determined to vindicate against male supremacy. The present paper focuses on the Victimization of Women in the Autobiography of Kamala Das' *My Story*, and how traditional norms have oppressed her desires. The paper also reveals how Kamala Das was victimized and exploited in the Patriarchal society.

Keywords: Patriarchy, social norms, gender discrimination, self discovery.

Introduction: Kamala Surayya was formerly known as Kamala Das was a distinguished poet and novelist in English literature. She is famous for her fiery poems in English. Her autobiographical novel, *My Story* reveals the impact of past traditional patriarchal norms and the Institution of marriage victimize women in Indian society. All the social and cultural institutions have made woman's life miserable even in post colonial period. They have oppressed her emotions and shattered her dreams in Silence. Her desolate quest for love and freedom from biased traditional norms ended up in vain turning her out to be unconventional in the post colonial period. She is treated as an iconoclast. Through her autobiography she tries to reassert her identity in self confession. It is a bold and uninhibited

self-revelation of a courageous woman who tries to live traditionally but forced to break the social rules in order to satisfy her instincts in the postcolonial oppressed world.

Kamala Das' autobiography, *My Story* is a radical attempt at using the genre to subvert prevalent patriarchal biases. She has shown indomitable courage to tell the truth about her feminine experiences. In the Preface of her novel she writes the purpose of her autobiography in self confession. Unlike her male counterparts, Kamala Das does not have the liberty to plunge into the act of writing. So she deliberately attempts at framing the context to reveal the constituents of a female writer in justifying herself in the Preface. "My *Story* is my autobiography, which I begin writing during my first serious bout with heart disease. The doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of a sudden death, and besides there were all the hospital bills to be taken care of. I sent a telegram to an editor who had been after me to write such a book to be used as a serial in his journal. He arrived after a day bringing with him the total remuneration for the serial. He was taking risk, as I was then very ill and it did not seem that I would be able to write more than a few chapters. And yet, he agreed to the deal, seated near me, holding my hand which had a green withered look. From that moment the book took hold of me, carrying me back into the past rapidly as though it were a motorboat chugging through the inky waters at night. Between short hours of sleep induced by the drugs given to me by nurses, I wrote continually, not merely to honour my commitment but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets, so that I could depart when the time came, with the scrubbed-out conscience"(Das, *My Story*). .

According to Goek Lin Lim, Das locates the origin of her autobiography in confessional impulse before attending the death bed. Kamala Das' intention of emptying herself of all the secrets reminds us of the definition of autobiography. Henry Mackenzie defines autobiography as "the confession of a person to himself instead of the priest" (Floekenflik, *The Culture*). One of the reasons stated in the Preface by the writer that prompted her to write autobiography is to "pay off the medical bills", seems to be just a pretext to write the autobiography, as her husband is a Reserve Bank employee and could have taken care of the medical bills.

The intense urge to confess and to reveal her secrets as a foretelling to her readers before she leaves the world. Generally in Indian women autobiographies the central theme is

the relationship between the author and her mother, father or siblings, but Kamala Das does not prefer to talk about her parents. In the very first chapter, she writes about her father as a busy man and not very affectionate. Her mother is also so a vague and indifferent woman who spends her time lying on her belly on a large four posted bed composing poems in Malayalam". She and her brother were neglected in their childhood.

Kamala and her brother were neglected in their childhood. She writes, "they took us for granted and considered as mere puppets moving away limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that it we had personalities that were developing independently, like study shoots of the banyan tree growing out of crevasses, in the worlds of ancient fortresses". Kamala was not close to her parents even in her childhood. She was lonely even with her family members. She had a loving and indulgent grandmother who gave a detailed account of the customs and traditions of Nair family.

Indian women suffer because of inequalities and traditional social oppression. The families arranged the marriages of women when they are very young. Marriage was thrust upon Kamala when she was fifteen years old, with a matured man Madhava Das. He was a Reserve Bank employee, more than double her age. Neither Kamala nor her mother Could raise their voice against the verdict of the patriarchal supremacy of her father. She describes her feelings with pathos, "I was a burden and responsibility that neither my parents nor my grandmother could put up with for long. Therefore with the blessings of all, our marriage was fixed. Not yet I said, let me go back to Calcutta to finish my exam" (82). Her father never listens to her. In Indian tradition the girl is not given a choice whether to continue her education or to choose her bridegroom. Her brother was allowed to continue his education.

Kamala had not experienced the discrimination until her marriage was fixed. After her marriage, she was sent to a world where she is prohibited from speaking or listening to her inner voice. Kamala Das' autobiography can be read as victimization of women in a patriarchal society. She writes about her marriage as, "the victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of the union that would be born a few children" (85). Kamala wished for herself a place of human dignity. She refers to her husbands attempt at sexual gratification as she writes, "without warning he fell on me, surprising me by the brutality of the attack, again and again throughout that unhappy night. He hurt me all the while the

Kathakali drums propped against throbbed dully against our window and singers sang of Damayanthi's fight in the jungle" (90).

Kamala Das' married life began with mistrust of her husbands sexual infidelity. He boasted of his sexual exploits he had shared with some of the maid servants in his house in Malabar. All her girlhood dreams and feminine utopias were shattered. She writes with heavy heart, "I had expected him to take me in his arms and stroke my face, my hair, my hands and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that my father to be, and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life (84). She was utterly disappointed as all her expectations have ended up in vain.

Kamala Das realized her insignificant position after her marriage. She wished for a place of human dignity. "I kept myself busy with dreary house work while my spirit protested and cried, get out of this trap, escape (27). She feels as if she is trapped in an arranged marriage. Her spirit yearns to escape but she was afraid of public opinion and the reaction of the society. Her experience of marriage is that of confusion, dejection and depression not of marital bliss. She is worried about her parent and relatives. A broken marriage is distasteful. She had her two year old son to take care of. It would be impossible for her to get married again. She had neither educational qualifications nor a job to led an independent life.

Kamala later on comes to know the horrible truth about her husband. according to West board, "Madhav Das, the husband of Kamala was actually your home sexual who brought voice to his bed but would also introduce her to his Bosses to help him to get job promotions and encourage her to share their beds with her. He would ask detailed questions later on about her activities with them. When Kamala was 37, one of her ovary was removed for constant hemorrhage and she was under the treatment of oestrogen hormones, which led her to experience heart attack at a young age" (Westport, The love).

Conclusion: Kamala Das entered into conflict with the traditional image of femininity. She felt herself misfit everywhere. The urge to annihilate herself gave way to her career as a creative writer. Kamala Das courageously challenges her traditional role. She openly asserts her individuality as a woman and as a writer in the closing pages of her

autobiography. Traditional patriarchal norms continue to exist and exploit and victimize women even in the post colonial period. The life of Kamala Das is no exception.

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