

EROTIC EXPOSITION AS AN ART: A STUDY IN MY STORY BY KAMLA DAS

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Abstract: *My Story* of Kamla Das is an autobiography with a difference. It has its own class and beauty. Though Kamla Das is basically a poet, her prose style is also peerless. Though the book is originally published in Malayalam entitled *Ente Kalha*, yet its English translation done by Mrs. Das herself is more popular and widely circulated throughout the world due to some open confessions about sexuality. Undoubtedly, it is supposed to be the best-selling autobiography written by any women author in India. *My Story* is rated as a world-class autobiography because some erotic expressions have been expressed very artistically here. In the WIKIPEDIA the editor suitably writes: "In the book, Das recounts the trials of her marriage and her painful self-awakening as a woman and writer. The entire account written is the format of a novel. Though, *My Story* was supposed to be an autobiography, Das later admitted that there was plenty of fiction in it."

Any literary masterpiece becomes a work of art just because the author maneuvers his pen quite skillfully infusing revolutionary ideas into the content. The following extract from *My Story* is enough to justify as to how bold is Mrs. Das in expressing sensuous episodes:

"I hate upper berth, she said. She looked around to see if anyone was awake. Then she lay near me holding my body close to hers. Her fingers traced the outlines of my mouth with a gentleness that I had never dreamt of finding. She kissed my lips then, and whispered. You are so sweet, so very sweet, I have never met anyone so sweet, my darling, my little darling...."

It happened while Kamla was just fifteen and the girl in question was eighteen. This homosexual attraction was not one-sided, rather it was mutual. Yet, the description is highly solemn and the language denotes a genuine passion. Erotic expression has been aptly beautified here by the author. Thus the upcoming research paper intends to discuss at length as to how *My Story* of Kamla Das is one of the best examples of artistic presentation of erotic moments.

Keywords: Erotic Exposition, Art, Autobiography, Homosexual Attraction, Passion Etc.

Introduction: Among the confessional poets and authors of India, the name of Kamla Das is taken with a great honour. At international level she falls in line with Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton etc. This style of writing emerged in 1950s and 1960s. In such writings "I" becomes the most important. So, there is much of personal flavour in such works. *My Story* of Kamla Das has been a very popular autobiography from the point of view that open expositions of sensuality and sexuality by a woman writer were supposed to be taboo in 1960s and 1970s. This memoir was published in 1977 for the first time. There was a lot hullabaloo in readers circles of India because Mrs. Das had touched upon such vulnerable issues which were confidentially in practice but no woman author dared to write about them. Kamla Das *My Story* was an exception then. While writing a book review of 'Kamla Das : *My Story*' Suresh Kohali has aptly commented,

*"It is not often that one comes across an autobiography which is so outspoken, so controversial, so positively honest, so lyrical in its narrative. Perhaps, no other Indian woman writer has made more startling self-revelations than Kamla Das in *My Story*."⁽¹⁾*

Mr. Kohalis opinion is undoubtedly true. Around the time when this autobiography was published, no female writer of English in India had courage to speak or record about her sex-life so ingenuously. That is why **My Story** turned out to be 'Cult Classic'. It is a novel that records the journey of a girl child into womanhood crossing many hurdles and hypocracies.

The novel **My Story** contains fifty chapters altogether and each chapter reveals stepwise journey of Mrs. Das. The very first chapter focuses on British-India divide and here she registers how her childhood was neglected due to schizophrenic schedules of her father. That time she was six when she started attending a school. The school was mostly dominated by British children, and so the writer and some other Hindu Kids did not get the same importance like the British ones. Even a poem written by kid Kamla was recited by a cute scot girl Shirley when the governor visited her school. She had often been a victim of racial discrimination in the school. At home most of the time she felt lonely. Kamla has confessed in the sixth chapter of the novel that she wanted to marry an 8th standard loafer boy Govinda about which she talked to her grandmother. She was in standard six that time. Though she might not be knowing the read meaning of marriage, yet it was in her pre-teen days that she knew all sensations of sensuality and that she wanted to enjoy in company of the boy Govinda. But, talking about sex was taboo in her family like any other families of India. She writes :

"No wonder the women of the best Nair families never, mentioned sex. It was their principal phobia. They associated it with violence and bloodshed. They had been fed on the stories of Ravana who perished due to his desire for Sita and of Kichaka, who was torn to death by Draupadi's legal husband Bhima only because he coveted her. It was customary for a Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night. The only heroine whose sex life seemed comparatively untumultuous was Radha who waited on the banks of Jamuna for her blue skinned lover. But she was another's wife and so an adulteress. In the orbit of illicit sex, there seemed to be only crudeness and violence."⁽²⁾

When she was nine she was sent to a boarding school by her father. But, there to she encountered constant discrimination. It was like hell for her. After some time she was brought to Calcutta by her father to live there. Her father had a royal life-style to which she call "The Bengal Aristocracy. Here she was sent to another school where both British Kids and Indian children studied together. It was around this time that the author had her first menarche about which she records badly in Mahabharata section of the novel :

"My frock had large spots of blood on it. I felt the hot blood flowing on to my thighs and dripping down to the floor. 'I am ill, I am dying', I cried to my mother. 'Something has broken inside me and I am bleeding.' My mother lifted my dress and said with a laugh, 'It is nothing to be worried about, it is what all girls get at twelve or thirteen.....' She asked me to change my dress and taught me to wear sanitary pads."⁽³⁾

Such a bold write-up can only come from the pen of Kamla Das. Had it not been so she would not have described the story of her maiden menstruation so openly. That is why she is called a revolutionary author. As a feminist she has certainly brought light in the dark world of society. It is again in this novel she describes about her lesbian encounter, episodes related to her coital encounter with her husband and even her infatuation with her tutor.

In the twentieth chapter entitled 'A Brush with Love' Kamla Das has painted the picture of her lesbian rapport. One of her family friends who was just eighteen year old developed physical attraction towards her to which she too reciprocated. While traveling back to Malabar with her in train she experiences something unique and different. She describes her lesbian encounter as follows :

“As luck would have it,
 the girl I admired was
 with us, and when the lights
 were put out and the streaks
 of moonlight revealed
 the settled limbs of the
 sleepers she crept close
 to me, and asked me
 if she could sleep on
 the same berth with me. I
 hate the upper berth, she said.
 She looked around to see
 if any one was awake.
 Then she lay near me
 holding my body close
 to hers. Her fingers traced
 the outlines of my mouth
 with a gentleness that I had
 never dreamt of finding.
 She kissed my lips then,
 and whispered, you are
 so sweet, so very sweet,
 I have never met anyone
 So sweet, my darling, my
 Little darling....”⁽⁴⁾

Immediately after this incident, her father settled her wedding with a boy quite older in comparison to her age. He was already known to the family. But Kamla did not like him at all. But, in those days, girls were not that much bold so as to go against their parents. She had to accept what was fated. Her college friends were also sad and shocked that she was going to be wedded off even before completing her education. In fact, her father was a bit conservative about girls as he belonged to the family of conservatives. He did not think it necessary to take the consent of his daughter in this regard. What he had decided was final. He did not even care for the compatibility of the couple. Not only that, he even arranged for the meeting of Kamla with the boy he had chosen for her. He came to Calcutta to meet his bride to be. But his visit proved to be highly shocking for Kamla. She describes his detestable and abhorrent activities in these words:

“Whenever he found me
 alone in a room, he began
 to plead with me to bare
 my breasts and if I did not,
 he turned brutal and crude.
 His hands bruised my body
 and left blue and red marks
 on the skin. He told me of
 the sexual exploits he had
 shared with some of the
 maidservants in his house
 in Malabar.”⁽⁵⁾

Kamla did not expect such a wretched behaviour from her husband to be. But finally she was tied into nuptial knot with him. Unhappily, she accepted him to be her master of fate. She even bore a child for

him. But, she was not mentally settled even after becoming his better-half. Yet, she made adjustments with him.

Commenting on Kamla Das Anshu Sailpar in her research paper entitled "Subjective Indentity : A Study of Kamla Das's My Story writes :

*"Kamla Das's confession writing gives the reader an opportunity to probe into her inner self. Her multiple selves come into light to the readers in her autobiography **My Story**. Through her autobiography she tries to seek out her identity as a woman and as a writer. Her outspoken autobiography springs a lot of arguments. It projects her multiple affairs, her strained relationship with her husband and so many hidden facts of her life. The book faced different controversies as it contains some frank discussion of author about her quest of love inside and outside the marriage. She writes about the society as well as the traditional conservatism in which she lives. She possesses a clear vision about relationship. Deriving inspiration from her matrilineal background, she celebrates woman's body and pleads for its integrity."⁽⁶⁾*

Thus, on the basis of above analysis it can be easily summed up that by her rich linguistic faculty Kamla Das proved that even erotic description can be artistic. And, this she has proved in her autobiography **My Story**. This book is definitely a milestone from the point of view that a woman writer has created it.

References:

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