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4

## Element of Revolt in Kamala Das's Autobiography - My Story

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### Research Paper - English

Kamala Das, (*My Story* 1978/2009) is a distinguished figure in Indian literature who faced many controversies for bold assertion of the self. Das is the author of nearly 30 novels in Malayalam and 3 books of poems in English. Kamala Das's outspoken autobiography *My Story* has created controversies as she describes her multiple affairs, her strained relationship with her husband and so many hidden facts of her life. She is frank, bold and controversial in her life as well as in literature. She writes poetry as a woman. She takes pride in the fact of being a woman. This is certainly the starting point of all kinds of feminism.

Kamala Das is a woman of vibrant sensitivity, delicate sensibility and fragile yet transparent mind-set. She started her identity-voyage as a Malayalee story-teller *MadhaviKutty*. She had recently arrived, in her new incarnation, *Surraiya Begum*. The selection of *MadhaviKutty* alias Kamala Das alias Kamala *Surraiya* for the prestigious *Ezhuthachan Award* of the Government of Kerala had led to an unending controversy. The controversy was initiated by Sri. P. Parameshwaran, the well-known Acharaya of *Sangha Parivar* and current Director of *BharatheeyaVicharaKendram*. The main complaint against her was that she was notorious for her obscene writings which were





unfit to be read in a family, especially by sisters and daughters. Worst still, they criticized that her writings were repellent even for personal reading.

When the Western woman suffered oppression in silence and fear, the women of Kerala lived in a matrilineal society where the husband lives with the wife's people. Divorce was a simple procedure and there was no stigma attached to widowhood or single blessedness. Matriliney certainly foregrounded the position of women by tracing descent from a female ancestor or passing on property through female line. This was in direct opposition to the marginalization of women in major societies all over the rest of the world. But the British colonizers brought a breakdown of matrilineal institutions and in Post-independent India the situation of women became exactly the opposite. Women became doubly oppressed; as Indians and as women.

In the history of literature, we come across great men and women writers with idiosyncratic habits and pretensions. The great philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau in his classic autobiography, *The Confessions* confesses many sexual aberrations and misconducts. But modern researchers and scholars have established that all the misconducts described were not true and that he was very pious and had led his life as a puritan. Das's confessions in her autobiography are like Rousseau's, totally imaginative. Das claims that she began to write the text in the mid of 1970's from her hospital bed. She wrote the autobiography in order to pay the hospital bills.

She also had a wish to empty herself of all the secrets hidden within her, so that she could depart when the time came, with a scrubbed-out conscience and without any burden. Since the publication of her autobiography, she has repeatedly changed her stance on this topic in interviews and essays. She first confessed that her autobiography was nothing but truth and then declared that it was just a wish- fulfilling fantasy, an altar-life she had created for herself. The orthodox readers of Kerala branded it immoral and called the author as "seductress" says Satchidanandan K. in the Prologue named *Relocating My Story*. Her autobiography shows certain psychic aberrations, as it was evident in her pretended conversion to Islam. But such aberrations do not make her importance less in any way as a writer.





Das tries to unify herself to locate her true existence and identity. She caricatured the male to emphasize the plight of female in the world of men and manners. She reveals her own realization of the uselessness of her anger and protest against social patriarchy. Her father, a Rolls Royce and Bentley salesman, stands between the British corporation and the Indian upper class. The childhood that she describes seems to be darkened more by socio-political and national climate than by personal or individual self-image. Her ethnic consciousness and her sensibility were shaped from her early childhood by these social experiences. She was not an outspoken child. The only companion close to her was her brother.

She was humiliated due to her dark skin by her family members also. In a Nayar tharavad women were cautious about their complexion and their looks. They tried hard to maintain the tone of their skin. Kamala was not very good looking. Her grandmother was worried about her skin and tried her best to make her a good looking woman. "My grandmother was worried about the duskiness of my skin and rubbed raw turmeric on Tuesdays and Fridays all over my body before the oil bath. She oiled my hair and washed it carefully with a viscid shampoo made out of the tender leaves of the hibiscus."

Generally, in autobiographies written by women, the central theme is the relationship between the author and her mother. However, Kamala Das does not prefer to talk about her relation with her mother. She talks about her self-evolution and self-development and her self-identity since childhood. She has been gradually evolving herself, her own identity. She has been trying to quest her own 'self'.

Kamala Das focuses on third world women's oppression. She puts her relations with men at the centre of her story. She does so because she wants to show in what atmosphere an Indian woman lives. In such adverse conditions she is always in quest of her self-identity. Indian women suffer because of inequalities and social oppression. In the patriarchal society the father being the head of the family arrange the marriage of the daughters at young age. The girls are forced to marry men they have not met before. They then move from their parent's home to their husbands where they are essentially, servants. Das was married at the age of fifteen. She provides an excellent opportunity for a psychological study of the loveless and emotionally deprived life of an imaginative



  
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