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A Search for True Love in Kamala Das's *My Story*

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Abstract

Kamala Das's *My Story,* is the account of what a woman thinks or reads, and who she wants to sound like. It is a story of a woman in a particular society refusing to accept the traditional impositions on woman in the name of being the second sex as stated by Simone de Beauvoir. In fact, while it may not be important for a good wife to be happy, it is essential that she is to be treated or respected as an equal sex in the society. It is the story of how a woman takes herself apart, so that when she is reassembled, she has become her own self. However, anyone who wants to get at the personality of Kamala Das, should read this little autobiography. In fact, *My Story* is not an autobiography in the conventional sense. It is rather imaginative and fanciful rendering of certain autobiographical experiences that is affected the poet's growth from childhood to maturity, from innocence to experience. The poet is outrageously candid in her revelations that are rather wish-fulfillment of a repressed soul than true indulgences. It is very obvious in the writing of Kamala Das that the truth in My Story is only partially factual and the major part of the book is committed to the truth of feeling and imagination thereby concluding to the search for the true love.

Keywords: Impositions, Second Sex, Autobiography, Innocence, Experience.

INTRODUCTION

In Kamala Das's *My Story*, the most noticeable fact about her bold attempt is that, in spite of trying hard to kill and throw the traditional Indian morality, she constantly remains aware of her deviation from the accepted norms. Time and again she tries to return to her culturally defined self and then discards it realizing that it is not meant for her, that she cannot live her life in the way of the cultural prescription. From such a vacillation between the traditionally defined role model and her personal yearning to carve out an undefined independent role for herself springs an apparent inconsistency in her narrative, for which she has often been blamed. To a sympathetic reader who looks upon the writer

as a fellow human being and not as an accused person on whom he is required to pass his moral judgment, Kamala Das's case provides an excellent opportunity for a psychological study of the loveless and emotionally deprived life often imaginative romantic being who could not get what she desired out of any of her usual, socially recognized relationships. In her view it is the socialization of a woman as woman that makes her what she becomes. Kamala's case convincingly demonstrates the truth of this observation. She was an ordinary girl, a 'good' girl whom her deprivation and psychological needs turned into a rebel. Her circumstances made her what she became. With an understanding husband, she would have been a happy wife and would have made a success of her marriage. But her husband's aggressive, assertive nature to sex and her as yet, immature body at the time of their marriage, resulted in her being called as frigid. How strange it is that even in the context of this most intimate relationship between man and woman in which both ought to be equal partners giving and receiving pleasure from each other both physically and spiritually, women are looked upon as mere instruments of joy. Therefore, Kamala Das tries to find a way to get real or true love in her autobiography, *My Story*.

DISCUSSION

Naturally, in India, a girl's future is shaped not by what she thinks but by what her parents think about her. When Kamala Das was hardly fifteen years old, she was engaged to her cousin Mr. Madhava Das who was a bank employee in Bombay at that time, a man senior to her both in age and sexual experience. When her fiance visited them at Calcutta where her father was posted at that time, her sweet dreams were shattered. Soon she faced her fiance demanding her body by handling it crudely leaving "blue and red marks on the skin", recalled by Kamala painfully. Her fiance narrated the tales of his sexual exploits with the maid servants back home in Kerala. Now Kamala Das knew that her marriage too, like her mother's was going to be unsuccessful one, in which she was simply to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger. She hated it, but there was no choice. She was a Nair girl who was expected to be good and obedient and silently do her parent's bidding in any case, even if she protested, she knew that her autocratic father just would not listen to her. She was married the same year; the child bride who had spent her childhood in the large Nalapat house. She was now taken to Bombay where her husband lived in a small rented flat in Santa Cruz. The first wedding night, the newly married bride, Kamala Das requested her husband to pray to Lord Krishna. Instead of responding to her request positively, he tried to make love to her in a very hasty and rude manner. However, that was an incomplete rape. Because of this factor, there developed a sense of hatred towards her husband, right from the first day of their life living together. Kamala Das asks her husband, "This is over wedding night, we should first pray to Krishna,". (*My Story*: 89)

Leaving behind the openness of Kerala, Kamala began a monotonous life in her husband's world, a small flat wherein lived a man with an equally narrow view regarding marriage. For him the only meaning of marriage was sex while for the bride it was full of romantic longings and poetic connotations. Kamala Das once said, "… would have undergone any torture to be able to please him, but my body was immature and not ready for love-making. For him such a body was an embarrassment…". (My Story:90) Though filled-with the terrifying fear of her angry husband and a deep disgust for her own frigid body which was incapable of satisfying him, the wife dutifully surrendered her body to her husband night after night. The repeated experience of rejection, jealousy, and bitterness within no time turned the sweet young girl into a tired, bitter woman with his child in her work. Soon she was moved to Kerala for her first delivery. When her first son was born, the husband came to see the baby and stayed there

for some time. But instead of looking after his wife and providing her emotional security, he spent most of his time with his cousins and sister-in-law. In fact, he did not pay due attention to her and never bothered to converse with her. But at night, leaving aside any consideration for the new-born or the mother, who was slowly recovering after the child birth, he would insist on asserting his right as her husband. Kamala Das recalled those nightmarish times, "At night he was like a chieftain who collected the taxes due to him from his vassal, simply and without exhilaration. All the Parijata that I wove in my curly hair was wasted. The taking was brutal and brief." (*My Story*: 94)

On his return to Bombay the first letter that he wrote was not to his wife, who had undergone the pains of delivery to give him a son, but to a cousin who let him flirt with her. This apparently trivial incident hurt Kamala Das's womanly pride so deeply that it changed the very course of her life. It was a turning point in her life. She sadly recalled, "I knew then that if love was what I looked for in marriage I would have to look for it outside its legal orbit". (My Story:95) She said that she made up her mind to be unfaithful to her husband. Back in Bombay, again the same old routine life was resumed. She was very busy those days for the child's care and household work and at nights for the silent surrender to the lust of her husband. So, her life was monotonous and horrible. Sometimes, she could just helplessly go on listening to the hungry child crying in the next room while her body was trying to please its owner. Once when the child was two years old the cruel father had locked him in the kitchen so that he could not come out of the door. The poor child cried himself to sleep on the cold bare floor of the kitchen. This incident made her lose whatever little love she had for the man. She often thought of committing suicide or taking a divorce.

When her second son fell ill seriously, the suppressed thoughts of suicide once again came to the surface, this time with greater intensity because her husband had now, in the face of the crisis, sought comfort in a homosexual relationship with one of his friends. She sadly recalled, "They behaved like lovers in my presence". (My Story:104) Driven to despair by sad circumstances she once made up her mind to jump down from the terrace of their multi-storied building and end her life. But during that dark moment of desolate desperation, she had a rare experience in such a way that out of her agony sprang a poem. It was a miracle and she came to her sense that she was not meant to die in defeat. She must live to face the cruelties of the world and express her pain in poetry returning beauty for ugliness, pleasure for pain. Climbing down from the terrace she sat at the writing table and penned her first poem. Now, Kamala Das was in a new self, determined not to live a loveless, miserable life of timid frigid woman. 'Ripe for the sexual banquet', she looked for the right man. Here comes the growth of sexuality in her life as well as in her literary works. She describes her mental state of those days in a very untraditional, poetic way thus, "Like alms looking for a begging bowl was my love which only sought for it a receptacle. At the hour of worship even a stone becomes an idol". (*My Story*: 118)

Her love turned many a stone into idols. In her search for true love, she came across men from different walks of life and of different ages, some even old enough to be her father. They loved her for different reasons. While some of them were to fill their own inner void or to enjoy her poetic company and others to satisfy their needs or to work with her. People like Carlo, her white pen-friend-turned lover, wanted to marry her. But she was not 'the divorcing kind'. She may love them, may lie in their strong arms for some time, but she must return to her sons and husband. Carlo was not mistaken in believing that he was like a waiting room between trains in her life. Kamala Das recalled Draupadi of the *Mahabharata:* "In daydreams I too became a Draupadi who commanded her adoring mate to

brave the demons to get flowers for her wavy tresses." (My Story: 31)

Now, Kamala Das turned herself to Draupadi in her frantic search of true love. With so many lovers and admirers around, life for Kamala Das was a wonderful experience. Recalling that happy feeling she wrote, "I was like a poor girl who found herself rich all of sudden. I was drunk with power" (My Story:145). For the first time in her life, now, she had the feminine urge to look beautiful. She visited beauty parlour, changed her hairstyle and tried to look modern. At last, her cup of life was overflowing with love. She was in love with life itself.

CONCLUSION

There came a sudden change in her life. It was just at this most blissful juncture of her life when her happiness was at its summit that she was suddenly reminded of the mortality of the human body. She had a bout of serious sickness followed by a long period of hospitalization during which she promised God that she would live an acceptable, respectable life if she survived. But on her recovery, she was once again lost in the realm of love or she was charmed by the magic of love, for she yearned for an ideal true lover. However, no man could provide her all that she needed. All of them viewed her as an object. So, the wide gulf between the way others see her and the way she sees herself, gives her the sense of futility and hopelessness. She, therefore, says "I expect my men to behave like Gods". It shows clearly her ultimate yearning for the thirst of spiritual knowledge. In fact, she expresses her spiritual longing, which she develops in her journey that is also another form of true love. One can also feel the ever -increasing desire of Kamala Das in her search for true love in which she encounters many men. However, none of them could provide her true love. All men are equal as they are after her just for lust on the pretext of providing true love. What really Kamala Das yearns is everlasting love that can provide her emotional security which is based on true love. The journey ends when Kamala Das comes to realization of the self towards devotion of Lord Krishna. For Kamala Das yearning for true love that she could ever imagine is now possible only through the foundation of spiritual knowledge which is based on complete surrender to Lord Krishna. Therefore, she says;

> "Through the smoke of the incense I saw the beauteous smile of my Krishna. Always, always, I shall love you I told him, not speaking aloud but willing Him to hear me, only you will be my husband, only your horoscope will match with mine...". (My Story: 92)

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