Chapter IV
Autobiographical and Confessional Note in
Kamala Das’s Poetry

Before we trace the above qualities of Kamala Das’s poetry, it would be proper to define these qualities of writing. First, we take autobiography. It is a genre in which writer peeps into the self. It is the self-reflection of self. On one hand, autobiography satisfies the curious fascination for the ways of human mind and on the other, it introduces the link between one’s external behavioural pattern and inner psychic functioning. It passes as an interesting self-narration of a person who is representative of a class or section of the society. Each autobiography happens to be the vision of one person's life in one way and the reflection of a community, class or society in another. The questions like what do we mean by 'autobiography' and how it can be studied, need discussion on the meaning and process of writing it. One has to know the position, the place of autobiography and consider its meaning only after going through some useful definition offered so far by various critics. Similarly, one cannot proceed to examine the process of its writing without marking its identification as a form, distinct from biography, diary, memoir, letters, even the 'autobiographical' writing.

As for as our interpretation is concerned we have a brief survey of it.

Autobiography, literally means, “the story of a person’s life or a book containing it, written by that person...”¹ Autobiography, is a ‘book’, containing the ‘story’ of one’s ‘life’. The story – like presentation in the book – form, makes it a part of literature. The content ‘life’ brings it so close to life – realities that its position becomes ambivalent. Autobiography is the only form that holds such ambiguity because it affiliates life with literature. Apparently, it
is an aesthetic story of life and conceptually it is the microscopic vision of life. It is both, dramatic and authentic.

In critical terms, autobiography is defined by James Olney etymologically as “derived from the Greek elements” referred as ‘auto’- the self, ‘bio’ - the life and ‘graphe’ – the writing. This is the simplest clarification. ‘Autos’ indicates the significance of ‘self’. It is the self of the writer that is both the narrator and the chief participant of his life-story. Being the first unit in the term 'autos'-self occupies the foremost position; if somebody else narrates the life-story, it can be 'biography' and not ‘autobiography’. 'Bio'-really means life that is lived, past as life-experience of the author. The involvement of memory with the past creeps in the process of life-presentation. It is the reproduction of past-life through the memory that creates half of the complexity in the form. The sense of past and the role of memory are significant components of structural analysis.

‘Graphe’ means 'writing' that confines life to the ‘book’ and past to the ‘literary record’ in a document. The process of writing implies the author’s entanglement in a triple-role. The autobiographer has an assignment as a writer, narrator and protagonist of his life-story. It is necessary to discuss the position of autobiographer to examine the process of writing autobiography and this is to be done in further analysis wherein the ‘edition’ of life – story can be scrutinized.

James Olney’s definition, as revealed above, explains that three constituents of autobiography are self, life or past and writing. This definition communicates oral narration of one’s life may not be appropriate for what is strictly referred to as autobiography. There is a formal definition that tries to confirm the focus of autobiography: "An autobiography is the account of an individual human life, by the subject himself…Above all, its principle must be security of the self.”
Autobiography, as the account of individual’s life, holds the genesis of individualism in this sense of ‘security of the self’. It is self-narrated experience of self. It is self-representation by the ‘subject himself’ and its self-discovery has to follow the principle of ‘self-security’. Self is omni-present in autobiography, so much so that it sounds something closer to ‘self-centred’ or ‘self-complacent’ to sceptic minds.

Nevertheless, it is always an interesting venture to enter into a person’s private life; to keep into an individual’s emotional involvement; to know about one’s convictions and secrets, passions and prejudices, personal and social codes of conduct.

Autobiography, then, is not a mere statement of what a person used to be and what one is but it also means the view of one’s inner mind as a ‘driving force’. It aims at a sort of wisdom in the form of self-knowledge and self-exposition. Autobiography, to speak in a philosophical manner, is compensation against the bias that creates a gulf between what one appears to others and to oneself.

The word 'autobiography' was not used for a differentiated literary form till the end of the eighteenth century. Earlier than that ‘autobiography’ was simply known as containing a part of author's life. Hence Augustine’s Confessions, Montaigne’s Essays, Collingwood’s Story of My Thought, and Nabokov, Speak Memory did really suffice to demonstrate the sense of autobiography.4

Today we know the form as a coherent vision’s of one’s life wherein it's possible to estimate the past and interpret the self. It is the author’s introspective analysis of both, the past life and the present self. But the autobiographer may write essays, theology, philosophy, the story of mind and thought, even with the banner ‘autobiography’.
“The emphasis on ideal self-revelation that informs the mass of critical efforts, to define autobiography, derives from an urgency to legitimize autobiography as an aesthetic genre in order to distinguish it from mere historical document”.5

An autobiography, in a sense, is a conversion of lived experience into a literary experience relived. It reflects life as an intensely personalized vision. It has the inherent appeal to readers and intimate bond of trust with them. The autobiographer shares the hidden and the unknown details of his life with the readers.

There is bond of trust between the autobiographer and his reader.

In this connection, some critics differ in views. Many critics consider autobiography a self-oriented pamphlet of one’s ideology or a chronicle of philosophical life. Such a prejudice springs from their undue emphasis on the subjective and the self-righteous nature of autobiography. In a truthful autobiography, the inner self of writer is depicted through the life-narrative.

Gusdorf in this reference suggests that autobiography “is an effort to recapture the self in Hegel’s claim, to the know self through consciousness”.6

Away from the controversial statements about certain elements in autobiography as truth, authenticity etc., the fact remains that it is an attention – capturing form-literature. It is a creation that offers a kind of knowledge enlightening both its author and readers. Before writing autobiography, even the writer does not know himself as well as after having written it.

It is in this sense that autobiography has no rival in literary creations. The experience of involvement, dilemmas and conflicts make the writers offer a sort of dramatic monologue of self in autobiography. It may or may not seen logical to others but it holds the pressure of self from within, for the author.
Its core is the pre-occupation with self that the cousins of sceptic critics may see a sort of self-love. One has to consider that an experience may not be quite a similar thing as a reflective, retrospective or philosophical statement of it.

In this regard we may quote M. H. Abram’s view: It is accout of the protagonist’s growth and development as he or she “passes from childhood into maturity” along with “the recognition of his identity and role in the world”.7

Finally, one can say that all the scholastic efforts to define autobiography in clear terms may seem deceptive or failing in one or the other point. Despite all the established and varied definitions of the genre, the meaning of autobiography can be understood only by examining the essential, inevitable factors and elements related to or found inside the form.

In this concern observation is given below:

1- Autobiography as a form of prose explores the writer’s private life without inhibitions or bias.

2- In reviewing the life, the writer of autobiography reveals the inner world of consciousness and analyses the external reality in artistic way, combined with self.

3- Autobiography is a retold life history embodying the writer’s observations of his contact with the world.

4- Autobiography is related directly to an individual.

5- By opening a personal and private series of events to the society, through autobiography, the writer transcends the limitations created by the social norms.

6- Autobiography in a way is ‘criticism of life’ like poetry and the writer invites social criticism through the act of writing one.
In the attempt of pursuing and persecuting the truth, the writer of autobiography faces a gulf between the personal and the social reality.

Autobiography is a literary conspiracy against the socio-cultural standards of sophistication and presentation in the sense that it exposes a secret side of life.

Autobiography as a specific vision of individual's life, demands a consonance between the past and the present life of the writer.

Autobiography implies a record of one’s personal values, inner urges and visions combined with the actual life – experience.

Autobiography holds the most fragile memories consisting of the truth that we call the truth of the moments.

Predetermined subjective mood in autobiography inspires introvert perceptions to objectify and form the self-expression.

In the light of above points, we may follow the aspect of autobiography.

In academic world, autobiography has suffered many changes and transitions, although in the mind of common readers and in the world of publication, its place has always been unshaken. No other subject receives more intense, sustained and varied scrutiny today. The scholars keep reflecting on style, language, ethnicity, gender psychology or philosophy of the self-presentational mode of autobiographies. Readers have always preferred autobiography to the other books because it offers an insight into the private, confidential world of an individual.

In the early nineteenth century, autobiography was regarded a sub-type of biography and was placed in the secluded shelves of history, even in good libraries. There was no specific distinction between the autobiography proper and other personalized forms as diary, memoir, letters or travelogue. In the twentieth century, autobiography is not only a separate literary genre
distinguished even from 'autobiographical' fiction or poetry but it has already established its value as a form of writing coming closest to life and actual reality of experience. Nevertheless, autobiography proper still suffers the lack of appropriate place and unbiased outlook in the eyes of critics. Why cannot we call autobiography ‘life' or label it as ‘literature’ so confidently as we do in case of history, biography or even poetry, remains to be examined.

Autobiography is neither life, nor literature. It is neither history nor biography. It occupies a narrow place between the two. It holds its grounding on the thin, rather invisible line between life and literature. Life is the root of its content and literature is the branch that bears its form as a fruit. The two elements in the word ‘bio’ and ‘graphe’ include the sense of life and literature in autobiography because it is life brought into literature.

In this light, one may question, what is that which is literature and not autobiography? It is accepted that all literature is the reflection of life in its varied forms; Life is the source, the nourishing force of all that is written. But there is distinction in the case of auto – biography. The initial ‘auto’-the self, distinguishes it from other genre. That is why auto – bio – graphy differs from bio – graphy. Autobiography is 'self-written biography'.

In nutshell autobiography is a fine fusion of life and literature in the sense of its literariness; it varies in the degree of truth and imagined possibilities. Thus it is specific type of writing its motive explains in this regard.

Why people write autobiography is a question not less mysterious than why people do not write it.

The reasoning in motivations for writing an autobiography begins with a primary question: why write? And then moves on to why write an autobiography? The urge for writing and impulse for writing autobiography seem to be twin-factors because the very process of creation of a literary piece
is rooted in the life—experience, which is the subject matter of an autobiography. Life is the source and connection for both literature in general and autobiography in particular. The reason for writing, in any form, are rooted in the social ethos, the private ‘autos’, the personal ‘eros’ and also the mental ‘bio’, the psychological climate of ideas, associations, impressions and responses.

Asking oneself, what causes a man or woman to consider the life—story worth—writing—down; the answers are found in many forms. The simplest is the change, subjectively felt very strongly by the author in himself or his life. The self-appraisal attaching the significance to the age or time to which the writer belongs is also one of the simple reasons. The informative attitude and desire to add to human knowledge is one more simple reason.

John Fitzgerald notices that people in public office rather than by ‘ordinary’ men and women write the most autobiographies. The purpose behind such self-oriented writing can be literary with communicative function on one hand, and on the other it can be an urge to create more than to communicate. According to Fitzgerald: “both travel-literature and autobiographical accounts of early settlers shared the same assumptions: that the experience is in itself interesting and worth communicating and that a public, however limited, will be found to share this interest”.10

Like any other act, writing is prompted by thought. The seed of all expression is found in thinking. A thinking mind strives to express. There is a sort of quest in the act of writing itself. This is the quest for expression. In autobiography, it turns out to be a quest for self-expression. It is a way towards searching and discovering the self. It is a quest for truth, in one’s life and the perception of the truth by the author. An autobiography is never a complete memory-picture of the incidental or historical passage of life, it is not the history of life in that sense.
To locate the exact motives of an autobiography is a very complicated task because every individual considers himself to be a person different from others and therefore deserving a special interest. Autobiography has its genesis in such feelings. It is taken to write, with conscious or unconscious sense of 'uniqueness' or ‘difference’, the writer's implications of the process of his becoming. The autobiographer imagines that the process of his becoming is a very interesting one for others and it will capture the reader's minds through something that it reveals, informs or instructs.

After reading an autobiography, a reader may question the author, “what is that in your life-adventurous or uncommon, that you found worth-narrating in such a life-story?” But this would not be fair question. Only an adventurous life with certain uncommon events deserves the narration, is a wrong generalization. People who live simple uneventful life, also have some motives, prompting them to write an autobiography. It is the desire of recording, inevitably making it a story-like record rather than life history. Autobiography, therefore, is a life-story and not a life history. Autobiographer, then, has an impulsive urge to tell his story, however simple or uneventful it may appear to others, indeed, all biography is to some extent autobiography disguised.

The question of authorial intentions in autobiography is seemingly straight but involves a philosophical set of ideas and answers. That is why it engages the attempts of aestheticians and critics of the genre eluding their critical intelligence. It is a sort of fallacy about intentions, where-in a critic cannot jump at any conclusions about the intentions of the author as artist. In their influential, essay ‘The International Fallacy’ (The Verbal Icon, 1954). Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that the author's intentions are not the proper concern of a critic: “The essay argued, the meaning of a work was better discovered by attention to ‘internal evidence’, than to external evidence-the private disclosures of poets, their friends, or biographers.”
We should not go into the deep of their thinking but it is true for autobiography to present the matter with reasoning.

It needs a gradual reasoning into the references used by the writer that can lead one towards the possible intentions behind a work. For Hegel, an artist is a conceptual thinker. He has a specific aim, reflectively chosen. He is different from the craftsman in that “the craftsman follows an already existing pattern, while the artist invents the pattern itself.”

Applying this to the case of autobiography, one can mention that the aim of writer in autobiography can be the experiment in “inventing a pattern” for life that is lived by him. The autobiographer’s art is in making this pattern story-like and preserving its ‘historicity’ of life at once. Pascal examines the formal structure, functions of autobiography very skillfully, and points out that the act of writing alters in some degree the shape of the writer’s life so that “a new formulation of responsibility towards the self . . . involves mental exploration and change of attitude. Autobiography therefore has function far beyond the pleasure of reminiscence or reflexion on an interesting set of experiences.”

Question of truth is an eminent part of autobiography. There is a quest for the truth of self; hence it is natural to know its aspect.

Autobiography is the expression of the author’s impression. Since each mind has its own story to tell, autobiography cannot be tested as true or false. It can be seen as a means of discovering truth on behalf of the writer. It defines the writer’s truth in relation to the world around him. It can be truth of his private ideas, actions and reactions. It can be the truth of his experience as somewhat similar or different to that of others. It is the writer’s effort to find the reflection of bare truth about himself. As Barrett J. Mandel puts it "Autobiography is a way to inter in the truth like every pure experience; it takes
birth from that state of existence, which is superior to memories, general falsehood, great deceptions and desire to be or look honest and sincere.”

Such a statement simply signifies the narrative mode of truth in autobiography that emerges from nostalgic state of mind, out of the desire to prove oneself truthful. The truth in autobiography can be unique or singular while it can be, at the same time, dramatic and aesthetic. The narrative in it follows the presentation of many-sided reality of life.

To examine the realistic shades of truth and to distinguish the part of autobiography, as fictional and artistic on the other hand and historical or biographical on the other, one requires an eye that can discern the creative from the historic, the truth of situations in life from the truth of consciousness, the reality of external world from the reality of personal passions and emotions. What matters in the pre-set expectation of factual details from autobiography is that such an expectation makes the reader’s mind prejudiced and demanding.

It has an inherent appeal for the readers to accept the confiding position with a sort of empathetic considerations. This appeal originates from the writer’s mental preparation to open up exposing the private truth of his life and his permission to the readers to enter into the private world and share it. There are other variations of that observed in the creative and critical writings, such as practical reality as truth, mental vision, dreams and intoxicated fits of mind, meditation, truth of the moment, truth of death and truth of sense or perception or even truth of emotions.

This matter may come from good or bad experiences but one cannot question its reality, validity or utility just because the form is self-narrated. Its appeal lies in its idealism of presentation through the writer’s self-evaluating judgement of his life.
The question whether autobiography offers the truth in its vision cannot be answered straightforwardly since autobiography exists beyond all practical and factual truth. It perceives that particular kind of truth, which is semi-physical, existing in the author’s mind or inner consciousness. The critics of consciousness see literature as an act and analyze it as a drama-taking place in the psychic structure of the writer. Sarah N. Lawall offers her critical explanation:

"The consciousness perceived in an emphatic reading need not fit into a familiar pseudo – biographical and formula … because they define a work as the expression of an individual personality . . . aimed at an available personal experience which symbolizes and communicates part of the human condition. The idea of literary consciousness leads to an analysis of the work as a mental universe, a self-contained world where human experience takes shape as literature." 17

The truth in autobiography, then, derives its order and form in mental universe of the writer to offer the possible representation of reality. Autobiography places its accent upon the subjective self. Therefore, the truth in it happens to be the subjective representation of reality, shaped by the personal feelings, coloured by the mysterious perceptions of an individual mind. In this aspect of its subjectivity of consciousness, autobiography comes close to romantic writing. On the one side there is the truth of reality, on the other the truth of writer’s feelings and where the two coincide, an outside authority can decide nothing.

The autobiography is the discovery and the perception of truth from the past of writer’s life and it is not the expression or evidence of that truth that can be a binding upon him. There is artistic representation of art despite the artistic presentation of truth, the value of autobiography remains intact.
It is significant to note that the truth in autobiography may be vague and elusive, it may be double-sided, it may be obscure or mysterious, it may be narrowed vision of mind of individual and it may damage the critical significance of the genre but on historical and psychological plane, that remains, no doubt, the truth of the writer’s feelings.

In the realm of autobiography, there is the matrix of confessional mode. Confession is both a principle and a thematic mode in an autobiography. It is the germ of creativity and confession both that produces the urge for self-expression through what John Keats employed by his term, ‘the egoistical sublime’. The romantic cult of Narcissism and fascination with self-image is at the root of confession. Literally, confession means an acknowledgement, an avowal, acceptance or disclosure of some sort. In a literary application, the term confession does not necessarily imply any religious connotations such as the admission of wrong-doing or acceptance of sinful actions.

The term ‘confession’ is primarily related with the religious concept of sin, and Christianity signifies it by the creed of offering its utterance in the church when the priest gives ablution. It is also related to the basic religious feeling of the acceptance of human limitations.

God as the father offers his unconditional love despite human actions but the bad actions are differentiated from the good that we don’t do; the priest offers that feelings of penance through the sacrament of God’s love and forgiveness.

On psychological plane, confession implies the solution of guilt complex, fear or inferiority and it is in this sense of the act that it is more significant to an autobiographer. For the author, it is just a sort of mental surgery that will offer a new life to the patient.
The writing of autobiography may not necessarily be the moral analysis of life but it is not simply a literary enterprise. It happens to be the process of locating the ‘I’ with the placement of self in the past but identification in the present. It is the process of knowing the self and making it known by establishing an ordered form of growth wherein all bad, secret things of life, wrong or right, are to be accentuated. Confession is cathartic in this sense. It offers the vision of truth without crossing the limits of decency on socio-moral plane as well as personal order of expression.

Realization of self is the core of autobiography. In fact, realization of one’s own actions, words, deeds, mistakes is the central notion in the process of confession. Confession can be a motive for writing autobiography and involves the same spirit of self–realization.

The elements of confession in poetry, states W. H. Abrams, “designates, sometimes shocking detail with which the poet reveals private or clinical matters about illness, experiments with drugs and suicidal impulses.”

The notion of good or bad can be conveyed only after its realization in the mind of the writer. In religion it gains the value as a purifying influence and in autobiography it becomes a valuable feature as the relieving source for the suppressed perceptions of the author. The writer as an autobiographer uses confession as a device also for connecting the past and the present, with the locations and connections of perceptions and interpretations. A sensitive mind is always a victim of the moral consciousness created by social order or sense of public opinion. One talks about oneself with the awareness that reader is a member of society and may form impressions according to their collective concepts. The social consciousness thus becomes an integral part of one’s self-presentation. It helps an individual to form his ideology and to sustain the moral sense of what is good or bad in one’s past actions, events and life-situations.
In autobiography, the writer is haunted by such a socio-moral consciousness that inspires him to offer confession for the sake of cleansing his image of self. Stephen Spender refers to this consciousness in his autobiography: “The social reality intrudes upon the individual’s private life in two ways: one through the presence of his family, friends, acquaintance and relatives; the other through his own imprisonment by the values stamped on his mind from the childhood. The artist also, as an individual, faces this intrusion and feels that he is ‘hound by the external event’.”

Confessional mode, therefore, is an important part in the structure of autobiography. It works as a principle; it proves cathartic exercise to the writer’s saturated emotions and it brings charm in autobiography by introducing the truth of secret moments of past life. Confession has direct association with the mental upheavals of the autobiographer.

When we examine Kamala Das as an autobiographical and confessional poetess we find poetess has written an autobiography. Her autobiography supports of different level. She has presented all the matter which remained hidden in poetry. She writes about her childhood and married life. As it is explained the ‘Confessional’ adjective it annexed with autobiography. When one writes autobiography the person cannot avoid the confessional quality. The adjective is the eminent part of Kamala Das’s poetry.

After briefing background we came to the essential part of the chapter.

When we consider Autobiographical and Confessional note in the poetry of Kamala Das’s, following contents reflect in her vision.

1. As a Child and an Adolescent.
2. Love and protest
3. Matrimony and Domesticity
4. Isolation, Nostalgia and Creativity
5. Feminine and Confessional

Before the illustration of these points we would like to represent some lines of the poetess.

*I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar*,\(^{20}\)

And further we concentrate the following lines:

*Who are you, I ask everyone,*

*The answer is, it is I . . . . . .*

*It is I who laugh,*

*It is I who lie dying with a rattle in my throat.*

*I am sinner, I am saint.*

*I am the bloved and the betrayed.*

*I have no joys which are not yours,*

*No aches which are not yours. I too call myself I*.\(^{21}\)

Probably, these are the central points of an autobiographical and confessional note. The seed of her poetry lies in the matrix of above mentioned fact. Now we illustrate the above marked content.

Kamala Das’s family lived in the southern part of Malabar, in Kerala but her early childhood was spent in Calcutta (New Kolkata). Her father was an employee in a British automobile firm and her mother was well-known Malayali poet. Even as a small girl, Kamala Das could see that she was a member of a very conservative south-Indian family. Her early education at home was a causal force for her closed mind that she could never come out of. She grew up with the constant awareness of being a girl and her mind remained within the frame of her own feminine self. While young, her early marriage and domestic experiences caused her an infinite struggle as she became more
conscious of her existence a woman. In the account of her marriage and
domestic life, to which she was too young to respond, she explores the free and
hostile attitude of her groom who did not care for her feelings and responses.

Kamala Das was not an outspoken child. She had to hide her experiences
at school, from her mother and father. The only companion close to her was her
brother. A sense of irony, to which human beings are doomed, is found in her
expression:

"We did not tell our parents of the tortures we underwent to school for
wearing under the school-uniform of white twill a nut-brown skin"\(^\text{22}\).

In her autobiography she has expressed all her feeling of life, in which we
may explore her autobiographical and confessional note easily.

Kamala Das is largely empirical in her approach to childhood; she recalls
and sounds desperate in her pointed references to the racial and other specific
parts of her narration. She has some implicit purpose guiding her way of
arranging and putting forth her story.

In her observations, Kamala Das created a sense of suppressed
implications, which perpetuated the unhappiness of mob – psyche in general.
Her father had a job that brought him in contact with his British Superior. The
family’s attitude towards him was guided by his fair complexion and a sort of
ironical fascination was found in the mind of the family – members including
the servants. Kamala Das in her retrospective vision of memories, describes:
"My father's superior at that times was a balding red-faced gentleman named
Ross, who called my father 'my good-friend Nair' whenever he came to our
house, thrilling all of us to our very bones"\(^\text{23}\).

The feeling of being a neglected child in the family became a permanent
scar on the sensitive mind of Kamala Das. Her father was always busy with his
work and her mother, 'vague and indifferent', spent her time in composing
poems in Malayalam. The lack of tenderness and attention from parents was such a pain of mind that she shared it with her brother and a strong bond of love dveloped between the two. She had no sense of intimacy with either of her parents.

Kamala Das’s poem, *The Dance of the Eunuchs* is the opening poem in *Summer in Calcutta*. The sense of aridity and sterility that fills the poem combined with its biting irony makes it symbolic of the theme and tone of the whole collection. The eunuchs usually dance before a house where a baby has been born recently to celebrate its birth and to ward off the ‘evil eye’. Kamala Das recalls her exciting experience of watching a eunuchs’ dance thus:

*They were dancing in front of another house.*

*I parked my car near the kerb and watched them.*

*The dancers ware red lip-stick and rough. They made coquettish gestures. The more masculine looking ones sat in a row behind the dancers thumping on their little drums.*

The poem is characterised by a richness of organisation. It is futile to argue whether the dancers are really eunuchs or hermaphrodites because the poet’s concern is the pain exemplified by their episcenism and sterility. Their dance is, in reality, not a dance but a continuous convulsion; their voices are harsh and their songs melancholy. The appalling aridity in their lives is suggested by the weather:

*It was hot, so hot, before the eunuchs came To dance.*

The ‘fiery gulmohur’ enhances the impressin of dryness. The eunuchs are thin in limbs and dry. There is drought and rottenness in each one of them. *The*
Dance of Eunuchs gains its extraordinary impact from the series of contrasts the poetess weaves into its structure. The poetess’s strangled sympathy with the eunuchs and her emotional participation in their agony are kept on leash by the deft use of imagery and paradox.

The decrepit figures of the eunuchs dancing wildly till they bleed assume a sort of reluctant femininity. This redemption of feeling is projected by investing some of the eunuchs with male and some others with female characteristics.

Some beat their drums; others beat their sorrybreaths

And wailed, and writhed in vacant ecstasy. . .

By presenting agony of eunuchs, Kamala Das’s expresses her own feelings emerges with sorrows of her life. Here she has presented the inner feeling of eunuchs as if she expresses her own emptiness and hollowness of her life. We may easily see the touch of autobiography and confession in this poem.

In her other poem, My Grandmother's House, the matter has been delineated. She has presented her anguish and sodness pionently. She reflects the physical situation of the house in her agony combining her feelings of seperatin. There are scenes of snakes, rats, ants etc. which generates the natural discription with inner love.

There is too much of anguish and suffering in the verse of Kamala Das. It colours her poetic body through and through. The adverse circumstances have rendered her vision tragic and melancholy-her upbringing by careless parents, her marriage with an egonistic and vainglorious mang her disappointment in love and her illicit love-affairs with other men in order to remove her boredom and anxiety. Added to this, she is very sensitive and unconventional woman, who is not prepared to be dictated terms.
Her dissatisfaction in marriage and life sharpened her consciousness and she possibly decided to air out her grievances through the poetic medium because many unpalatable things can be said in this medium without incurring the wrath of powerful persons (who were rather shocked to read her revelations in *My Story*). Her autobiography in prose is more baffling and dazing than her poetry though both speak about the same person and her woeful situation.

In *Summer in Calcutta*, we have a poem entitled *Too Early the Autumn Sighets*, which clearly brings out her misery and sorrow:

Too early the autumn sights
Have come, too soon my lips
Have lost their hunger too soon
The singing birds have Left.\(^26\)

Another poem, *The End of Spring*, also symbolically articulates the end of happiness and cheerfulness and the approach of the old age, disease and decay. In *The Descendants*, the poem, *Substitute* is laden with the stings of ‘blackmail and sorrow’:

Life is quite simple now -
Love, blackmail and sorrow.\(^27\)

*The Conflagration* also highlights the poetess’s silent suffering in the company of a cruel man. She asks herself:

Woman is this happiness, this lying buried
Beneath a man ?\(^28\)

In the above mentioned lines we find the confessional attitude of poetess.
In *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*, the poem *Gino* offers us the following lines:

*Perhaps some womb in that*

*Darker world shall convulse, when I finally enter,*

*A Legitimate entrant marked by discontent.*

Examples of her ‘discontent’ and resultant convulsions and shocks may be multiplied easily and the reader is left to judge for himself whether she is sad and anguished or not.

Kamala Das’s poetry has a strong note of subjectivism, – the same sort of subjectivism as we witness in the Romantic poets of England (in P.B. Shelly and John Keats particularly). The poetess is mostly concerned with herself as a victim of circumstances and sexual humiliations.

*It was my desire that made him male*

*And beautiful, so that when at last we*

*Met, to believe that once I knew not his*

*From, his quiet touch, or blind kindness*

*Of his lip was hard indeed. Betray me ?*

*Yes, he can, but never physically;*

*Only with words . . . . .*

*................., while*

*My body’s wisdom tells and tells again*

*That I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace*

*And even death nowhere else but here in*

*My betrayer’s arms. . . . . 30*
Oviously, she does not like ‘physical’ love that her strong husband showers on her. And here is the hot, though somewhat unwilling chase of the inordinate desire of passion:

Of what does the burning mouth
Of sun, burning in today’s
Sky remind me . . . oh, yes, his
Mouth, and . . . his limb like pale and
Carnivorous plant reaching
Out for me, and the sad lie
Of my unending lust.  

If ‘burning’ makes this hot chase here, her ‘hunger’ for sex appears clearly in the poem Forest fire. The first few opening lines are given below for an illustration.

Of late I have begun to fell a hunger
To take in with greed, like a forest-fire that
Consumes, with each killing gains a wilder,
Brighter charm, all that comes my way.  

This ‘hunger’ is intemperate and terrible in nature as its smile with the wild ‘forest – fire’ signifies. The discontent in love at the legitimate source is definitely responsible for this condition of hers.

In this connection, the matter of confession may be deeply experienced in the concern of love and sex. A. N. Dwivedi maintains:

In The Descendants, we have such poetic pieces on the subject of love and lust as A Request, Substitute, The Descendants, Ferms, The Invitation, Captive and The Proud One, The Conflagration, The Looking Glass and
In this poetical collection, the fury of the poetess at not receiving adequate love from the proper person deepens into the debunking irony and tragic vision of a pitiable nature. There is no laughter, no humour in it and Kamala Das’s pessimism touches a hellish depth. Poem after poem she hammers hard at her husband – lover and articulates her intense desire of escaping from his clutches and attaining ‘freedom’. This is what we have in the poem Substitute.

Yet, I was thinking, lying beside him,
That I loved, and was much loved.

It is physical thing, he said suddenly
End it, I cried, end it, and let us be free.

This freedom was our last strange toy.

But this ‘freedom’ does not give her 'pride', or ‘joy’, or a sense of security, or a name, and in great dejection she tells us:

After that love became a swivel-door,

When one went out, another came in.

The ‘right’ kind of man she wanted has never met her. This is at the core of her tragedy:

For long I’ve waited for the right one
To come, the bright one, the right one to live
In the blue, No. I am still young.

And I need that man for construction and Destruction. Leave me…

In the poem Captive, we observe the same feeling.

What have
we had, after all, between us but the
womb's blinded hunger, the musted whisper
at the core . . . For years I have run from one
gossamer lane to another, I am
now my own captive.

The Physical form of love denounced by the poetess. The kiss of her husband she feels as dead kiss which has no emotional spirit. As an example, we can take Kamala Das's poem *Convicts*:

*That was the only kind of love,*
*This hacking at each other's parts*
*Like convicts hacking, breaking clods*
*A noon. We were earth under hot*
*Sun. There was a burning in our*
*Veins and the cool mountain nights did*
*Nothing to less in heat.*

The humiliation and deprivation of love and sex has been presented in the form of subjectivism. The same matter has been presented in autobiography with the same fervour.

All her quest for true love lands in disasters of love. All her poetry is an expression of her private experiences in matters of love and sex. It operates from the level of the personal and the particular rather than from that of the general and the universal.

In the writing of Kamala Das there is fusion of autobiography and confession. When we seek confessional feeling of Kamala Das, strong autobiographical touch is experienced there. The poem *The Freaks*, highlights
Kamala Das’s predicament as a married woman, who does the following on getting on true love:

*It’s only*  
*To save my face, I flaunt, at*  
*Times, a grand flamboyant lust.*

It is most striking factor of Kamala Das's poetry that confessional gamuts of her feelings are fused in love and sex.

We can observe Kamala Das's autobiographical and confessional note through the point 'Love and Protest'.

The pressures of socio – culture ethos around a creative woman tend to smother her freedom of expression. In its primary form, autobiography avails an opportunity for woman to satisfy their urge for self-expression, self-love and also, expression of love-life they live. Such an attempt sounds a strong gesture of protest to modern critics. In patriarchal set-up, women writers have often been forced to follow the standards of men imposed on them. They have not always been successful to overcome their anxiety of authorship and their efforts of writing what they have been thinking.

In this connection Kamala Das’s *My story* is worth-mentioning.

Kamala Das’s *My Story* has been one of such assault on the socio-cultural standards of evaluation. Here we find her protest. As a protest, she has fallen in love again and again to breach the domestic suffocation and for love she has protested against all that obstructed her path, including the identity, the security and the religion.

The dilemma of Kamala Das’s mind, infact, is her search for novelty and ecstasy, purity and perfection through love. In actual life, she received only chaotic and complex alterations and adjustment in the name of love. The
recurring theme of love is the core of her writings. As A.N.Dwivedi puts it, "the frequency of love-theme may evoke repudiation from nuns and spinsters and breed boredom in the minds of general readers like Sappho in Greek literature like Elizabeth Barrett Browning in English letters and like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath in modern American poetry, Mrs. Das offers a feast of vivid images of love couched in felicitous language. No doubt, love is her ‘forte’.”

It is most remarkable point in the poetry of Kamala Das that love and protest is the chief impulse of her confession.

Kamala Das’s pursuit of love was instinctive when she was a teenager. Since early age, she started defying the socio-moral codes of conduct. She had her personal set of codes emerging from impulses and urges of her existence as a woman. Truth had no alternative and her desire for love in moments of passion was the truth of experience. It is this ‘truth of the moment’ that has always been a determining factor in her life. She felt infatuated by her Bengali teacher and dressed like a Bengali woman.

Her parents noticed the change in her and the tuition was discontinued. In a fit of passion, she went impulsively to meet him but the Bengali gentleman brought her back carefully. It is in such moments of life that the autobiographer traces the threads of hidden layers of mind.

The spirit of protest in Kamala Das was the result, initially of her feeling of being an ignored child and then of the awareness of parental authority as well as social pressures. Her mind was always in her search of true love and pure feelings. She was always in her search and was anguished by her failure. This anguish sprung up again and again bursting out in her poems, drastic utterance and breaking away from all. Freudian explanation quoted by Christine Froula fits so well in Kamala Das’s evolution from love and rase to anguish and protest: "The woman writer faces a different struggle, for the literary culture governed by the father’s law, makes her not civilization’s inheritor but its outsider. As
Freud saw it, civilization has became increasingly the business of men . . . women. . Forced into background by the claims of civilization and . . . adopts a hostile attitude towards it.”

In *My Story*, she reflects the shades of love of from hero-worship to the homosexual relations. Apart from the parental love, she portrays the notions of mystical and mythical love when she talks about her lovers with reference to Krishna and to herself as ‘Carlo’s Seeta’. It is not the person that matter so much to her as the sense of commitment and the response she receive in love. She describes love as the solution of universal problems and calls it a ‘panacea for human ills’. It is only the foundation of love that holds, she considered the whole world and keeps life going. Yet love is not without the fatal flaws in itself. It includes the pangs of loneliness, breaches and anguish that cause the sense of loss, insecurity and displacement.

Kamala Das appears to fuse her search for love with her physical need for human association; while growing up as a teenager, she tried to satisfy her fleeting sentiments of love through a small boy Velu and an outlaw in her class, Govinda Kurup, whose arrogance and mischief she found admirable. Being transparent in herself, she follows its minute revelations and does not bother for acceptability or appropriateness on other grounds as social, cultural or moral.

In her confessional mood, she does not care for the scandalous reactions of her Indian readers. She breaks the linguistic taboos by describing the limbs of female body in unusual manner only to shock the typical Indian minds. Relating freely her ideas of love to sex-life, she not only crosses the borderline of feminine delicacy of expression and social reservations but also violently breaks the trab of patriarchal traditions. Setting herself as an uninhibited participant in the world of human relationships, nevertheless, Kamala Das never discovered any joyful approach to love as her object. She is entangled in bondages resulting
in break-ups, pain and disillusionments. About the incompatibility of female and male union, she observes:

\begin{quote}
In me, the ocean

Tireless, waiting...

I am the beloved and the

Betrayed.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Kamala Das’s concentration on love, lust and sex, sounds the echoes of her excessive desire to be interesting through whatever way possible. The interference of body in her ideas of love appears to be her fond device: "perhaps it was necessary for my body to defile itself in many ways, so that the soul turned humble for a change."

Occasionally she tries to justify her guilt-ridden conscience: "Love has a beginning and an end, but lust has no such faults. I needed security . . . physical integrity must carry with it a certain pride that is a burden to the soul."

For Kamala Das as a seeker love, what was realized was only sexual love that made her feel the complexities of herself since she accepted it as a good substitute. About her husband’s nursing her in sickness, she observed her own helplessness: “I accepted with gratitude his tenderness which was but lust, loud and savage.”\textsuperscript{40}

The deep-rooted sense of insecurity and alienation, that was both originating from her own set of ideas and desires and resulting out of her incompatible mate, carried her mind away from home and homely love. She narrates that she had ‘tried adultery’, ‘but . . . found it distasteful'. Her quest for love was genesis of all her trials in and out of the family.

In her unmixed honesty as the devotee of truth and transparency, Kamala Das is blunt enough to talk about her extra – marital affairs without any sense of
sinfulness. She is amoral to the point of explaining, “I always wanted love, and if you did not get it within your home, you stray a little."  

Her courage in speaking out the truth has always been unfettered by the notions of socio-moral codes of womanhood. Unconditioned by the traditional and orthodox taboos for women, Kamala Das has transcended the role of wife and mother to remain a beloved and a very honest individual.

She confesses that initially she began to write poetry with ‘the ignoble aim' of ‘wooing a man’. It was through love and man as the object of love that she wanted to discover her ‘self’. In the early poems, she reveals her obsession with sensuous, physical and bodily images of love but she is not lost in that physicality. Gradually the beloved in her matures to reach the conceptual understanding of ideal love and she turns to ‘Krishna’ as the ideal lover, identifying herself with Radha. In The Old Playhouse, she perceives:

\[
\text{Love is Narcissus at the waters, edge,}
\]

\[
\text{haunted by its own lovely face,}
\]

\[
\text{and yet it must seek at last an end,}
\]

\[
\text{a pure, total freedom, it must will}
\]

\[
\text{the mirrors to shatter}
\]

\[
\text{and the kind night to erase the water.}\]

Kamala Das writes in her autobiography that she always sought love and missed it but she hated the exploitation of body in the name of it. “The silly female shape had again intervened to ruin a beautiful relationship, the clumsy gage try that always, always, damaged bonds.”

In her autobiography, Kamala Das is everywhere ambivalent in her attitude to love and expression of it. On the one hand, she regrets the loss of real love in marriage and condemns her husband, for her decision to be faithless to
him by crossing the borders of moral restrictions for wife. On the other hand, she realizes that she was being misplaced and dislocated through her extra-marital affairs.

From the outside world, Kamala Das could pick up some visions of life during her extra-marital affairs. It was the beginning of her maturity through strange experiences. Finally, she found herself completely exposed to the realities of life. Kamala Das’s journey back into her past is in fact, a vision of her life, a journey from ignorance to knowledge, from innocence to experience and from youth to maturity.

Kamala Das’s yearning for love, ideal lover and pure relationship with complete compatibility remains unfulfilled only move her feminine self through so many phases of her “endless female hungers.”

Kamala Das’s narration about her love – life is essentially coloured by her sense of protest visible in twofold way of expression. She is against the male power as oppressing agent for the woman-in-love. She is also against her own self, ‘the female hungers’ that she finds ‘endless’, as the source of all feminine problems. In My story she talks openly about her relationship to man in both the legitimate and illegitimate bonds; it was always uneasy and peaceless:

Perhaps I was seeking the cruelty that lies in the depth of a man’s heart. Otherwise why did I not get my peace in the arms of my husband? Subconsciously I hoped for the death of my ego . . . you are always dissatisfied, carried my husband. Only I can understand you, said my Italian friends, come away with me.43

But she remained in her shell of domestic walls like Bernard Shaw’s Candida. She is not afraid of the bitterness of society towards her seeking of love and frustrations out of that. She broods:
“I wanted to suffer from incurable love . . . City fathers, friends and moralists, if I were a sinner, do not forgive my sin. If I were innocent, do not forgive my innocence.” Even in finding the lovers in her thirst for purity, she received disappointment every time. Her frequent heartbreaks are narrated in a poem she quotes in My Story with the ‘I’ as objectified personae 'she'.

Kamala Das's loud thinking as an autobiographer moves through varied forms and layers of emotion.

Now we take the point ‘Matrimony and Domesticity’ of Kamala Das’s poetry in which we observe the autobiographical and Confessional note.

Marriage is an important part in the life of a woman. Kamala Das is an Indian woman and in India, marriage is regarded as the summum bonum of woman’s life. Kamala Das’s family fixed her marriage without knowing her desire and choice due to the typically conservative thinking. Kamala Das’s relationship with her husband began in a very awkward way. Her husband was a common Indian male with self – oriented approach to life and wife. The first impression of his unexpected encounter was a shocking brutal touch for Kamala Das. “I felt hurt and humiliated” and the initial gap in their relationship always remained there finally to end in Kamala Das’s chaotic perceptions and fallacies of a woman’s love – life. An early marriage causes in many women’s lives an endless rift and love – hate relationship with their husbands.

Kamala Das had accepted the decision of her father because she could not protest. When her friends advised her to postpone it for the sake of her studies, she could only say, “It is all fixed . . . so let us not waste time discussing it.”

For Kamala Das, marriage seemed a trap she desired to escape but was fated to be ensnared in. She unwillingly allowed herself to be the victim of the
pseudo – moral pomp and ritualistic wedding following the traditional Nayar Culture. She remembers the event with a sense of irony and acute determinism:

My father beamed with pleasure. Everyone talked of it . . . All this glut made me feel cheap and uncomfortable. Marriage means nothing more than a show of wealth . . . the bride was unimportant and her happiness was a minor issue.46

Kamala Das’s domestic life passed through a series of disillusioning events. The only memorable event in Kamala Das’s marital life with her husband was her short period of her sickness when he nursed her and looked after her. A psychiatrist treated her. That ‘demented condition’ brought her husband’s humanness out when he took her away to Lonavala. She could notice his affection and concern. But very soon she analyzed it and found herself only a victimized woman in the role of a wife.

Kamala Das thus found herself doomed to be of a wife, in the mask of happiness exposing her private anguish, in her poems that she scribbled in the fits of melancholy. She could never escape the outbursts of her buried suffering and it is for this reason that she went on writing impulsively and releasing her suffocation through poetry.

Kamala Das present her ideas about her life taking the social background of a woman. Relationship of husband and wife defuses in the real life of a woman. A married woman caries the burden of house on her soldiers without protest. It is worthnoting that Kamala Das has presented the problems and difficulties of womankind in the field of domesticity. Feelings of injustice and cruelty of men for woman is the subject of her poetry and autobiography. In poetry she writes her feelings with the atmosphere of society but in autobiography she clears it neatly with open heart.
Thus Kamala Das has presented the process of woman’s tortures. She presents the relation and pressure of malekind in the wave of emotional activity. Her feeling flows like a river with plants, water and sands i.e. the physical, social environments and phychological responses. She stands on a platform, whereby she observes all the activities of male society. She wields her pen in the illustration of woman’s problems and libelities.

We may easily observed Kamala Das’s autobiography *My story* as a story of a lonely mind caught in the suffering of loss, agony of isolation and pain of nostalgia. Kamala Das’s autobiography according to Usha V. T. is “a tale of woe, the very act of defining female space . . . unsure of her intrinsic worth.”

The sense of uncertainty in Kamala Das’s self knowledge was in fact, the result of her isolation. It is the tension between her desire and disillusionment that makes her yearning for fulfilment a constant pain of her mind.

Most of the critics revealed feminist shades through their interpretations condemning her as an unpredictable rebel and many of them saw the controversial expressions in her as a publicity-stunt. It is true that she accentuated the unconventional and vocalized the unexpected. The motive however, was not so much to startle and sensationalize, as to pinpoint forthright, the complexities of human feelings, of female mind especially in the defining manner. She is regarded as a violator of cultural norms and social standards prescribed for a woman whether she is a creative artist or not.

A woman writer, in her need for some sharing human companion, takes refuge in autobiography and this is what happened with Kamala Das too. Her isolation in private life made her a poet, lost in nostalgia. Her creativity thus, in its primary form, is related with her sense of isolation and nostalgic lingering. It is the isolated artist in Kamala Das that passes through nostalgic shifting of mind, from the concrete reality of the ‘stone age’ and reaches out to the ‘grandmother’s house’ for refuge.
It is true that Kamala Das could not transcend herself and she has the right reason for that; as an autobiographer she is aware:

*A poet’s raw – material is not clay or stone, it is her personality . . . I . . . could not . . . escape . . . from personality . . .* 48

Above all, Kamala Das’s artless simplicity and spontaneity has no rival among the present literary figures. After delving deep into the stormy areas of autobiography, poetry, journalism, painting and politics, Kamala Das has now entered the realm of social welfare and religions rather spiritual ways of living. Her isolation seems to continue like her nostalgia and creativity. She is haunted by the trio of these stages even after changing her name place, fields of work, persons of contact and religious faith.

Now, we see the autobiographical and confessional note in above given point ‘Feminine and Confessional’.

The word ‘confession’ plainly implies the acceptance of truth in its original form. The element of honesty and truth are counted in confessional mode as values of expression. The sublimation of self, glorification of past, justification or defence of actions, can be the aims of confession. It is essential to explain that the word ‘confession’ implies the sense of guilt, sin or secrecy but it is not the only sense in it. The abnormal states of consciousness are considered and normalized in confession. It is confession that relates the self, with its realization to the past moments. Confession is the compensation for that silence which was pressurized. In life there is a need for secrecy while in autobiography there is a space for confession.

*My story* by Kamala Das is visibly confessional poem. On one hand she discloses the anticonventional views of a married woman confessing her love-affairs. On the other hand, she confesses the failure of her performance in the traditional roles of a woman in general and a wife in particular. It is the poets
and the writers who feel obliged to their truth and do offer confessions in their self-narrative. Confession of the past realizes itself as a work in the present; it effects a true creation of the self, by the self.49

As a person, internally restless with a dis-satisfied soul, Kamala Das confesses her sense of worthless existence, created by the failures in relationships. Such a confession is, in one sense, only an exposure of situations that disturbed her self – esteem; she had a sense of being misfit in the world of categorisers:

*I am a freak. It’s only
To save my face, I flaunt at
Times, a grand flamboyant lust.*50

The above mentioned lines gives the complete expression of confession, hereby we know the ideas of Kamala Das where she strikes her inner conflicts and feelings. Through confession, she has presented panorama of her person feelings. Her confession has expressed that could not be expressed through other ways. Thus the confession of Kamala Das gives us her intrinsic feeling with social – pressure. In this way, it is the combination of sprit and reflection that gives us the real presentation of poetess’s personality.
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5. Ibid., p. 12.


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34. Ibid.: p. 7.

35. Kamala Das: “Convicts” in *The Descendants*.


45. Ibid.: p. 74.

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49. Qtd. James Olney, Essays, p. 41.