CHAPTER II

SOCIAL CONFLICT

Social conflict in the lives of the autobiographers:

Man is a social animal. And where there is a society it is bound to have clashes and conflicts. Where there are vessels they clatter and make noise. Social conflict leaves deep scars on the psyche of a person. Protima Bedi writes how her father Laxmichand fell head over heels in love with ‘a black Bengali girl’ who was not acceptable to his father (the grandfather of Protima Bedi).

The social conflict occurred because in the words of Protima Bedi, ‘The Guptas were ridiculously traditional in a hypocritical way. Staunch upholders of India’s ancient traditions. Perhaps they seriously believed that but for them the fabric of Indian society would fall apart. Then fate played a nasty trick on the pure God-fearing Gupta’s family. Laxmichand fell head over heels in love with a black Bengali girl. (Timepass, P. 6)

Her father’s parents would have compromised the colour of the ‘Bengalan’ but they could not brook the idea of a girl without any family tree to speak of. The family background is very important in India especially with the traditionally orthodox people. Bedi writes about her mother.

‘...The girl had no family to speak of, or none that she wanted to speak of anyway. A great battle ensued in the Gupta household. Young Laxmichand was thrown out of the house, for he insisted on marrying the black Bengali’. (Timepass, P. 6)

The North and South divide is also a cause for social conflict. Her observances at Kimmens are graphically described by her: ‘Sometimes we
saw classical dances from the South in the movies and we always made fun of them. The music was so painful and hard on the ears, and the basic posture – was utterly ridiculous... Everything to do with South India, its language, its culture was cause for ridicule. As for the North Indian Classical style Kathak, which was easy and graceful to the eye, one was certainly very partial to it... Besides we were the convent crowd. Anything to do with Indian culture was sneered at. Indian culture was only for the middle classes, the locals, the frogs-in-the well who were not aware of the world outside. Indian culture was for the Hindiwalas not for the elite who conversed in English’. (Timepass, P. 14)

Her personal conflict mingles with the social conflict: She was eager to marry but she abhorred the idea when she saw husbands beating their wives.: ‘I wanted some man to want me madly and marry me, but there was nothing attractive about the marriages I saw around me. The famous music director who was our neighbour used to beat his wife every night... I had seen so many of my friends’ and our neighbours’ wives crying because their husbands ill-treated them’. (Timepass, P. 17)

Disturbed by the problem, rather phenomenon, of beating-husbands, she wonders:

“Why couldn’t the husband be nice to his wife especially since he was having such a good time anyway? Why should he beat her?’ (Timepass, P. 17)

This social conflict always confused and puzzled her. ‘Why couldn’t the wives find someone else for themselves? They always said, ‘for the sake of children’, and yet I remember, as they played cards every afternoon, laughing and gossiping before they found out about the other woman in their husband’s lives, they talked openly about how they would
love to screw that man and that or their favourite filmstar’. (Timepass, P. 17)

The self-same women ‘who yelled obscenities at each other, who abused their servants and thrashed their children, who viciously attacked their neighbours, who fought with the vegetable man and bullied him down to half the price... couldn’t dream of fending for themselves’. (Timepass, P. 18)

She describes of two gangs of the tough guys one led by actor Vinod Khanna and the other by Anil Johar. She says, ‘Almost all social life in the Bombay of the mid-sixties revolved around these groups’. (Timepass, P. 19)

It takes extraordinary courage, guts and frankness to admit: “I was sixteen, just out of school, determined to be a bad girl, and I was fascinated by these gangs... They often had fights, and people ended up getting hurt’. (Timepass, P. 19)

In the mixed parties the lights would be dimmed, hard liquor served and – this was the worst bit – girls and boys would dance close and kiss. This of course only increased my curiosity’. (Timepass, P. 19)

She goes to the mixed parties and discovers ‘that it was only natural to dim the lights for people to dance close. And there was nothing very wrong with letting a boy kiss you’.

It sheds flood of light on the inherent nature of the protagonist Protima Bedi whose bent of mind was towards permissiveness. In the sixties she was much ahead of her times as Tughlaq the monarch of India was much ahead of his times.

If a Hindu girl falls in love with a Muslim boy or vice versa there is much hue and cry and hullabaloo is made. It becomes a social stigma
especially for the girl if she strikes a deal with a boy belonging to other caste. It will be worth our while to know how the community and even its press react to such an inter-caste matrimonial alliance.

It becomes an acute social problem if a girl crossing her social sphere joins in matrimonial with a boy belonging to diametrically opposite of their own caste.

So, our protagonist Protima Bedi met a Muslim boy Jalal in the second year of her college. What appealed to her was ‘a sort of I-don’t-give-a-damn attitude’. (Timepass, P. 21)

But he was a pariah to other girls because he was a pucca ‘Mussalman’. Bedi writes: ‘The college girls kept away from him, saying that he was part of a gang of ‘pucca Mussalman’, it implied being cheap, dirty, violent, immoral and low class’. (Timepass, P. 21)

So she fell in love with Jalal. Not only she loved him dearly but also made up her mind to marry him. Her raison d’etre, as she put it in so many words, was: ‘I loved him dearly. For me, he was the husband I had always wanted, the one who would give me my ten children and a happy home. That he was Muslim, that his family and mine would never agree, didn’t bother me in the least. I loved him and he loved me’. (Timepass, PP. 21, 22)

Bedi feels no inhibition and her frankness borders on shamelessness rather she flaunts her sexual exploits with young, flouting and throwing to winds all the social restrictions and taboos. But at the same time this demerit becomes a merit of frankness and forthrightness in an autobiography, especially that of a woman, an Indian woman, at that. How frank she appears when she writes: ‘Jalal was not the first man to have me sexually, but he was first man I had consensual sex with, and it turned out
to be not such a great thing after all.’ (Timepass, P. 22)

And the familiarity with sex shed its importance and passionateness for her. Wonderingly she asks, ‘... I wondered if this was really that great passionate event for which people even killed one another. I’m not saying that I disliked sex, or that I was disinterested in it, or that I was disappointed. Very disappointed. Jalal was not bad in bed, but my body did not experience that fire, that earthquake, that tornado, those rainbows which I had expected’. (Timepass, P. 22)

Her confession is mind-boggling rather stunning. ‘Jalal was not bad in bed’ then what else she wanted more than sexual satisfaction in a man, a virile man, at that. Her body wanted and expected a volcanic fire, the earthquake, the tornado, the rainbows in her sexual partner.

How frank is the autobiographer about her lustiness and voluptuousness.

Protima reveals the hollowness of the society and hypocrisy of the girls who looked on the face value as not only prig but also very prurient rather in the avatar of sati Savitri. But the boys with whom they had enjoyed sex divulged everything about their life in bed, the sex secrets. Ruthlessly Protima Bedi exposes these Janus-headed girls. One side of the medal is puritanical whereas the other side shows them worse than prostitutes. This is the irony of society girls. Their expose is as follows:

‘I wondered why women who went about at night had such a bad reputation. I, for one, did not have any sex on those wild night outings. We laughed a lot, went on fast drives, watched the sunrise and talked about life – in short we were like brothers. Anil and his friends would tell me about their escapades with other women and talk with great sarcasm about those goody-goody girls who put on such an air of morality, but who
were, in their opinion, the real ‘fast’ and sexually frustrated ones. I would be aghast to hear them talk of their steady girls’ sexual habits and what-nots. I know which girl was good in bed, which one liked to be fingered, which one gave a hand job and which one used her mouth’. (Timepass, P. 25) It will not be without interest to mention that in our times US president Bill Clinton’s scandal of oral sex (sex with mouth) with his secretary Monica Lewinsky was blown out of all proportions. Coming back to Protima how she laughed at the self same girls to their face who posed themselves prudish whereas they were actually prurient and nymphomaniac. She says, ‘whenever I talked to those girls at parties and they replied to me in a very prim tone, I would imagine them doing the things that the boys had told me about and I would roar with laughter. I wanted to hug each one of them and say, ‘Drop this stiffness, relax’, but never got down to doing it’. (Timepass, PP.25, 26)

The autobiography of Protima Bedi reads like a novel corroborating to Anthony Trollope’s definition of an autobiography: ‘In our lives we are always weaving novels. This thought has been said in many varying ways. Thomas Wolfe closer to us in time than Trollope has observed: ‘All serious work in fiction is autobiographical’. 1

‘Myself and the ground work of my book’. It is John Florio’s, translation in 1603 of Montaigne’s sentence Je suis moi-meme la matiere de mon livre’ I find it a remarkable translation… Of all the statements of this nature that I have come across, the most awesome, the most definitive, is by Oscar

Wilde: ‘All artistic creation is absolutely subjective’.  

Confessions form the main ingredient of an autobiography and confessions while being penned down in an autobiography make the autobiographers panic-stricken and panicky. It will be interesting and pertinent enough to quote here Wallace Fowlie’s research of the word panic whose synonym is fear or dread. Fowlie says: “Recently I began wondering about the origin (of panic), the etymology of the word, and discovered that it may well come from the god Pan of Greek mythology. In my sketchy memory I had always thought of Pan as being a rollicking deity, associated with woods and fields and fertility. A semi-god perhaps, part animal, with horns and hoofs and the ears of a goat. A musician also who played reeds and pipes named after him: pan pipes. 

There my memory stopped and I was not close to understanding why panic comes from Pan. A bit of research helped. It would seem to spring from the fear of travellers at night who believed they heard the sounds of his pipes in the wilderness, an eerie, menacing noise. This fear is related, I presume, to the ugliness of Pan which caused the nymphs wooed in great numbers to reject him. 

So the emotion of panic and the shadow of Pan’ were dominant on his autobiography – the chronicles of his life. He says: ‘In this life of a chronicler, of a man tracking down the past, wooing the past in order to exploit it. I have felt myself turning into a predatory animal personality, not too far removed from Pan himself. In my own case at least, the

2. Ibid
tension is always there in the need to write a work that will be at once confessional. ¹

The word confessional as employed by Wallace Fowlie is behoving and befitting to Protima Bedi for she is frank and scrupulous about her confession. She confesses, 'I had the capacity to love many at a time....'(Timepass P.164)

As Fowlies says, 'Pan led a shoddy life in his lechery and was at the same time a skilled musician'. ²

With her confession about her exploits and escapades in the realm of sex she proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that she was as lecherous as Pan and also a devotee of Muse, like Pan with the only difference that Pan was a skilled musician and Protima Bedi was a skilled dancer.

As mentioned above the conflict didn’t bother her that she was in love with Jalal, a Muslim, she writes, 'I loved him dearly. For me he was the husband I had always wanted, the one who would give me my ten children and a happy home. That he was Muslim, that his family and mine would never agree, didn’t bother me in the least. I loved him, and he loved me. (Timepass P. 21)

1. Ibid
2. A god of flocks and herds, native to Arcadia, usually represented with the horns, ears, and legs of a goat on a man’s body. He was thought of as loving mountains, caves and lonely places and as playing on the pan-pipes. His sudden appearance was supposed to cause terror similar to that of a frightened and stampeding herd, and the word panic is derived from his name. (Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble,The Oxford English Reference Dictionary Oxford New York, 1995, PP. 1049, 1050)
Thank God the conflict was averted ipso facto as Jalal disappeared from the scene as he proceeded to the States for higher studies, but not before a sort of betrothal was performed by exchange of rings.

‘We met secretly, as usual, the evening before he was due to leave and wept bitterly for each other and for our love and made so many promises... We exchanged rings in very solemn and heart-rending little ceremony on the landing between the third and fourth floors of a building’. (Timepass P. 22)

Then Kabir, the matinee idol came in her life. She fell in love with him head over heels. For the sake of his love she had to ditch her parents because theirs being an orthodox Bania family they could not have brooked the idea of the intercaste marriage with Kabir Bedi...

She wanted an excuse to fall out with her father. So she walked up to her father and said, ‘Daddy, I want to go out for a party. It’s Christmas Eve’.

‘So? What have we to do with Christmas? It is not our festival. No, you cannot go’. (Timepass P.)

Hence she ran away from her father’s home to stay with Kabir.

She was caught by her father while walking down Marine Drive. But she told her father simply that she had to leave. In a fit of rage her father said, ‘All right, get out! Get out of this house and don’t ever show me your face again’. (Timepass P. 41)

Since that day she never darkened her father’s door, not while he was alive, until the heartbroken man died in a car crash.

It was a very tense moment for an Indian girl to live with a strange man (Kabir) like husband and wife without marriage. People would raise fingers at this illicit and illegitimate relationship. But she was made of a
different stuff who didn’t care for such sort of a social stigma. She says, ‘I wanted a relationship with Kabir, I did not want a marriage. I saw no reason for it’. Kabir too didn’t want a marriage. How defiant she was to social mores where it was a taboo for an Indian girl to live with a man without a mangalsutra i.e as husband and wife.

‘But when I became pregnant with Pooja, he said that we should get married’.1 (Timespass, P.45) So this was the raison d’etre, of course to show to the society that the child (in this case Pooja Bedi) was a legitimate one.

The familial status of theirs was of a strange blend. Kabir’s mother Oggee was a Buddhist nun, whereas Protima’s parents were orthodox Hindu, Banias.

By nature Protima is such that her lust for sex is not satiated by one man. Then enter the German – Fred Kinzel the engineer.

She recounts of the dance at ‘Hell’ discotheque. ‘Fred took me in his arms and our eyes met. A shudder of energy went up my spine and I looked away hastily… I was terribly attracted to him but I was frightened of having sex. My husband was not home, but I did not want to violate the harmony of our existence. (Timepass, P.55)

She confesses, ‘I was amazed at my hunger. I would go to Fred early every morning, in the afternoon, when he returned from work, then at night, and it wasn’t enough. Fred, Pooja and I were like a happy family.’ (Timepass, P.58)

1. In The Weekly Newsmagazine Outlook, Rahul Singh in his Bombay Diary reveals that ‘... Kabir Bedi (he got married to Protima there at hotel Samovar…’ situated in the Jehangir Art Gallery at what is still called Kala Ghoda’, Outlook, New Delhi, September 17, 2007, (P. 152)
Then the time came for Fred to go back to Germany. 'I told Kabir about him.  

I was unhappy with our marriage, I said I was in love with Fred. I was going away. My decision was final. Kabir broke down, wept... I gave in’. But she thought it was only a stop-gap arrangement ‘I promised Fred that I would join him in Germany in a few months’. (Timepass, P.59)  

The fall out of this illicit relation of a married woman was that she conceived but without being sure of paternity of the foetus developing in her womb.  

‘On my return to Bombay Kabir asked me whether it was his baby or Fred’s. It was a difficult time for me but I am glad I had the guts to say ‘I don’t know’. (Timepass, P.59)  

Siddharth, that was the name of the boy, was born and ‘Fred was convinced that the baby was his’. Poor Protima was caught in a cleft stick.  

She spilled the beans to Siddharth of the circumstances of his birth which made him upset. Siddharth as a result of it developed schizophrenia which culminated in Siddharth’s suicide in Los Angeles in 1997. In his suicide note he wrote, 'Please don’t feel any ‘guilt...’ I’m going happy, not sad.' (Timepass, P.297)  

In Canada he was roaming the roads like a vagabond. ‘Canadian police picked him up on the streets of Montreal and he was in the state hospital for days’. (Timepass, P.296)  

She was in the grip of excruciating pain at the death of an only son, Siddharth. ‘The guilt of not knowing my son – what made his heart beat faster, what his aims, his dreams were all about. How could I explain my feelings to anyone? I cried alone, I died every moment in flashback’. (Timepass, P. 297)
The frustration led her to live the life of a hippie or a gypsy. ‘I carried my grief to the San Francisco mountains, to the Yuba river where I went back to my original hippie self. I lived like a gypsy, close to nature, with the Indians who lived there with the legacy of their ancestors…. Siddharth had brought me here’ (Timepass, PP. 297, 298)

She could not escape the twinge of conscience: ‘Oh I went through that sad journey of guilt at not having done more, done right, done best… Had I been such negligent mother? Had I put too much energy into loving men, when I should have given it to my children? The guilt was immense’. (Timepass, P.298)

Protima feels no qualms to write about her experiences ‘at a fabulous place run by homosexuals’. ‘It’s a very chic place where they sing songs about politics and class with a lot of dirty words thrown in’.

Then there was an ugly banker who had paid for the party. Protima Bedi was declared the most beautiful lady, ‘most deserving of the champagne’. (Timepass, P.74) How shameless the banker behaved! No sooner had I sat down than the greasy banker put his pudgy paw on my thigh and squeezed’. Bedi, to teach him a lesson dropped the fork to the ground. ‘I bent under the table to retrieve the fork and on my way up, dug it hard into that fat paw. The oily banker screamed in pain, his hand shooting up above the table. He looked at me sadly’. (Timepass, P.75.)

Bedi is very free with four lettered **** obscene word. ‘The people in Europe appeared a sad lot. Never really connecting unless they were having sex – all out there, fucking, fucking and fucking’. (Timepass, P.82)

No other Indian woman might have the cheek or temerity to bring a vibrator from Europe or if she had done she would have confessed it. ‘In Europe I’d bought myself a vibrator. The man at the customs spotted it as
soon as he’d opened my bag and made a fuss about my bringing in
banned goods.

What do you mean I’m not allowed... My husband is out of town
most of the time, what do you expect me to do. I’m trying to be faithful.
Are you encouraging infidelity?... The man got so nervous about my flap
that he quickly put the vibrator back...’ (Timepass, PP. 82, 83) It is very
bold of Bedi to make such confessions.

After her return from Europe there appeared in a paper the scandal
of Protima ‘streaking down the busy road outside Jehangir Art Gallery in
Bombay’. She confesses: ‘The so called streaking had happened in Goa’.
‘What difference does it make?’

In spite of her ‘riyaaz’ and achievement as an Odissi dancer the
recognition and acclaim didn’t come her way because of her broken
marriage. This was supposed to be a social stigma that stood in the way of
her recognition and acclamation as an Odissi dancer. ‘My past image did to
an extent come in the way of my being accepted as a dancer. Dance was a
serious business, who did this starlet think she was?’... (Timepass, P. 123)

In fact, the very orthodox and religious pundits, especially in the
South, still write me off and never invite me to dance because for them it
is the whole image, the entire personality that matters. Even Sonal
Mansingh, because she has had a broken marriage or two lives alone and
has an unconventional lifestyle rarely gets invited’. (Timepass, P.123)

At one and the same time Bedi had affairs with many people. She
discusses the hypocrisy as a social problem with Manu a union minister.
She goes to entertain him in Centaur hotel in Bombay. She is very frank
about sex as she says with candour and forthrightness; ‘Let’s just talk
today, I don’t feel like sex’. ‘Okay, if that’s what you want’. (Timepass,
She flaunted her freedom from the bond of marriage because of divorce.

When Manu, the minister, says how he keeps his wife in the dark about his extra-marital affair, Bedi says, ‘I’m just questioning the basic morals of the society in which this is done ’... (Timepass, P. 138)

Bedi wants Manu to be sincere with his wife taking her into confidence if he has an affair with another woman (in this case herself). ‘The fact that you can’t, means that she’s not your companion. She is merely your housekeeper’. (Timepass, P. 138)

A woman who snatches other woman’s man becomes contemptible and abominable to her and her family. So Protima incurred the wrath of Jasraj’s wife and also the wife and family of Rajni Patel. Though she becomes an object of hatred and abhorrence she doesn’t hide the things from public gaze which are insulting to her.

She writes, ‘ I was not allowed to see Jasraj. His wife had cordoned off the ICU with her relatives... to ensure that I did not get anywhere near him.’ (Timepass, P.147)

But her ‘friend’ Rajni Patel manoeuvred to her meeting with Jasraj on his hospital bed. She recounts the meeting as under, ‘He cried and whispered that he loved me and I cried too. He asked me to give up Rajni and I promised I would do so’. (Timepass, P. 147) Still she was not allowed to see Jasraj. Despite the social restraints against meeting her ‘paramour’ she obdurately met him. The same was the case with her meeting with Rajni Patel. Rajni was afraid of his wife even to talk to Protima by phone. When Rajni was shifted to hospital, she begged his family to let her see him just once.
‘I never saw Rajni after that’, she laments. Until the morning ‘when a friend phoned and told me that Rajni had died’. (Timepass P.151) Despite society rejected her as a pariah (bitch) due to her snatching other women’s men, she was too bold and temerarious (shameless?) to be deterred. Her redeeming feature as a biographer is her honesty and probity in telling everything without holding back or suppressing any part of the events of her life.

While the letters she wrote to Rajni Patel were under print Sunil Sethi, a well-known journalist, then associated with India Today, published an article about the book in India Today. Its fallout was terrible. It tarnished her image. ‘They had sensationalized the whole issue, making it sound like a secret love affair... I was upset... ‘Even my closest friends were upset... But no one understood’. There were even rumours that labour union people were furious with her on account of maligning their late leader Rajni Patel. So much so that they wanted to beat her up. Once more she had invited the wrath of the society due to her rash behaviour. According to Protima Bedi, ‘There were articles and letters in the press against me, full of incredible hate and nastiness... I was told that the Shiv Sena was planning to kill me... Datta Samant’s men called up and said they would throw acid on my face...’ (Timepass, P.157)

In the opinion of Russi Karanjia, the editor of Blitz:

‘The deep and abiding love that I (Bedi) claimed, Rajni reserved for his wife Bakul till the last moment of his life. The book I was publishing was an attempt at blackmail’. (Timepass, P.159) People were angry that Rajni Patel, who was like a demigod also had clay feet. Karanjia learnt with disbelief ‘Obviously even men of his stature lived by double standards’. (Timepass, P.158)
Older men in the society were most upset about the book about the collected letters. Bedi conjectures the reason for it as follows: ‘Somewhere they all felt threatened that I would set precedent for others to speak out. They saw it happening to them so they condemned me’. (Timepass, P.161)

Some people felt envious as Manu said in so many words: ‘Manu said he felt envious that the letters were not written to him’. She wondered how could he say ‘in front of so may people’. (Timepass, P.161)

She questions herself, ‘Why couldn’t I feel for him the love that I felt for Da? Perhaps it would happen on its own sometime’. (Timepass, P.161) After all she was having her heart on her sleeve.

Kabir too, when met Bedi in Udaipur, read the manuscript and said judgmentally, ‘I should publish it. He even agreed to write the foreword’. (Timepass P. 161)

But then she decided not to write the book comprising her letters to Rajni Patel, as she told Manu, the union minister (one of her ‘sleeping-partners’) as she met him in New-Delhi. (Timepass, P. 161)

Instead, she decided to ‘use it as a chapter in my autobiography, whenever I wrote it’. (Timepass, P.161)

With the decision not to publish the book she had ‘the burden of the book off me’. (Timepass, P.162)

Her social status had reached to its nadir, to its untold low. As she puts it, ‘The press had painted me as some kind of scarlet woman and a greedy publicity monger’. (Timepass, P.162)

And that she ‘had written some sort of kiss-and-tell trash.” (Timepass, P.162)

The fact, however, is that she is a kissy girl, who is actually ‘kiss and
tell’ type which is manifest by her autobiography under discussion.

She resigned to fate as far as the book was concerned with the justification: ‘I did not feel the need to explain or defend myself anymore, not the need to share with the world the beauty of Rajni’s and my love. Besides, no matter what I said or did, people would never understand. They had an image of me as a flighty, immoral woman. It was my word against the words of honorable editors, columnists and the dutiful wife. Respectable society was their territory not mine’. (Timepass, P. 162)

The aforesaid excerpt from Protima Bedi’s Timepass is self-explanatory.

She was conscious that the social circles did not approve of her presence amidst their programmes. A case in point is Dr. Dayal’s escorting her to a Gujarati party hosted by rich Gujaratis who knew about Protima’s relationship with ‘their’ Rajnibhai. Who were thinking with irritation:

‘What on earth could the venerable Dr. Dayal be doing escorting Protima Bedi... That I publicly acknowledged all my relationships and made sensational statements which went against standard norms? That I wore revealing clothes and smoked, drank and laughed with men in public. I tried to see things from the perspective of those respectable, smug, boring and murderously ordinary Gujarati ladies. I could imagine how scarlet I would appear to them.

I felt hurt and a little humiliated’. (Timepass, P.163)

She was rightly conscious that society at large abhorred and shunned her because in their eyes she was an over-sexy, nymphomaniac.

1 Scarlet woman derog. a notoriously promiscuous woman, a prostitute (The Oxford Reference Dictionary, Oxford N.Y., 1995 (P. 1293)
True, they didn’t say it in so many words to her face, as she herself says, ‘Not that anyone said anything, but the disdain and rejection was there in their eyes, in the way they turned their faces away’. (Timepass, P.163)

She exposes the hypocrisy of the bunch, the lot, who, while video shooting kept focusing on Protima. She comments on them and their hypocrisy as follows: These were the same people who condemned me, who wished I hadn’t come there. Why did I want so desperately to be accepted by this boring, hypocritical lot. I was not a freak. What gave them the right to brand me as a fallen woman and feel superior and self-righteous’. (Timepass, PP.163, 64)

Her post-mortem of their holier-than-thou attitude is rather very cruel but in a way she is true that they too would have behaved in the same way had they had a chance! She pats on her back for being courageous and not a hypocrite.

She is too bold to be checked when she asks such questions: ‘And why was there this wall, a total non-understanding, when it came to a woman having more than one lover? Every woman I knew secretly longed to have many lovers, but she stopped herself for so many reasons. I had the capacity to love many at a time...’ (Timepass, P.164)

Protima Bedi tears to shreds the veil of hypocrisy of the women in society. She labels their outward charm as ‘the outward charm of cowards: ‘How wonderful to meet you, Mrs. Bedi’, Heard so much about you as a dancer. ‘How are you, Mrs. Bedi?’ They all appeared frauds and liars, because no one dares to bare their teeth and say, ‘I hate you, Protima. Who the bloody hell do you think you are?’ Not one wife dared to come and say, ‘Keep your filthy mind off my home’. (Timepass, P.177)
When Kabir divorced Protima he married Susan the American. Though Bedi grumbles 'Kabir was a better husband to Susan than he had been to me'. (Timepass, P.184) Yet Susan had her own grudge and grouse against Kabir as she told Protima in so many words: ‘I know all about his affairs. He doesn’t need to tell me. I just know. So long as it doesn’t come into the house, it’s okay. But what normally happens is that when he’s been involved elsewhere, the guilt is within him and so he finds the smallest reason to explode. Then he yells and says that he is suffocated by marriage and that his career is affected... I don’t care if he fucks around, but I certainly don’t want to take it out on me and the home’. (Timepass, P.184)

This redounds upon the social problem as Kabir goes mucking with girls on the film sets.

Kabir’s niece Ami’s wedding brought the three Kabir women, Protima, Parveen and Susan together. Here becomes Protima’s complex or pettiness manifest. She takes pride in being a ‘family’ in the house whereas ‘poor’ Parveen Bobby was deprived of this status because she had no children to claim herself to be the wife of Kabir. Though Protima herself was not in an enviable position because of a divorcee. Only Susan claimed the position of pride being Kabir’s wife. Such a false superiority on the part of Protima reflects upon her shallowness.

When dance became the life rather the very breath of Protima, she decided to establish a dance school – her Nrityagram. She chose a village called Hessarghatta in Karnataka.

R.K.Hegde, the then C.M. of Karnataka donated 10 acres of land for the project. When it took shape she was jubilant that it was a dream come true. But her joy was short-lived as the jealousy in the form of regionalism
and parochialism raised its head. The Kannadigas raised the question of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.

She puts it as follows: ‘A week before the inauguration, a group of artists had got together to protest against the success of Nrityagram. The excuse was a stupid complaint – that local Karnataka artistes were not being promoted by the government. It was the ‘outsiders’ who were being given land. ‘Outsiders’ like Protima Bedi’.

Bedi judiciously argues: ‘I thought about their calling me an ‘outsider’. If I was an ‘outsider’ there, then where was I am ‘insider’? My father was from Haryana, but I had never lived there’. (Timepass, P.239)

Her mother was from Bengal. She hadn’t lived there either. Nor she spoke Marathi despite living in Maharashtra. So the problem of regional chauvinism had inflicted her socially.

In India such feelings of bias not only between North and South are common but even among various states of the South themselves.

The narrow-minded people never realized that people like Protima didn’t keep culture alive only for themselves. Protima argues, ‘What they did was for the good of society as a whole. Song and dance and art can change the moral fibre of our society’. (Timepass, P. 240)

Kamala Das and social conflict:

Kamala Das, a precocious child, observed the society around her very minutely and became conscious of the social problems which afflicted the women.

Take for example, Lazar, the oil-seller ‘abusing the women in pornographic language who extracted oil for him by driving round and round his old mill... which only amused his victims, for they were, by nature, masochistic’. (My Story, P. 28)
The Pariah women ‘left their breasts uncovered. A pang stabbed the heart of Kamala and others ‘when Kali danced, we felt in the region of the heart an unease and a leap of recognition. Deep inside, we held the knowledge that Kali having killed for others, she was now lonelier than all’, (My Story, P.29)

Their heart wrung at the thought of Kali’s loneliness. At an early age of nine when she was a student of a boarding school run by Roman Catholic nuns she had a brush with lesbianism. Sarda Menon, who grew up in Singapore, was the prettiest girl in the hostel. “She had stylishly cut dresses which reached only to her knees revealing the slight bandiness of her calves, which only made the legs more arresting … A second-class boarder girl from Goa fell in love with her and kept pestering her…” (My Story, P. 40)

How at such a tender age it dawned upon Kamala Das that the relationship was the perversion that is called ‘lesbianism’.

One day ‘the Lesbian admirer came into our room when Sarda was away taking a bath and kissed her pillowcase and her undis hanging out in the dressing room. I lay on my bed watching this performance, but she was half-crazed with love, and hardly noticed me’. (My Story, P. 40)

Kamala Das reveals the strange characteristics of her classmates at the boarding school run by the Roman Catholic nuns. For example an ugly duckling Annie falls in love with a handsome boy which is only a one way traffic. It was only a make-believe love affair which was germinating in her fertile imagination only. The flat-bosomed girl boasted that her lover was ‘dying to touch’ her ‘round smooth breasts.’ She even showed Kamala a make-believe ‘bruise on her upper lip’. In answering Kamala’s question, ‘Who bit you’, she said, ‘That one, the rich boy who loves me’.
She was so much obsessed with love that she invented a boy and an imaginary love affair that too with a handsome rich boy. (My Story, P. 46)

Her concoctions go to such extremes that she whispers to Kamala, ‘...he climbed over the wall and came to my bed last night when all of you were asleep’. It is all figment of her imagination – her wishful thinking. (My Story, P. 46)

Ultimately she was expelled from school for her obsession with sex and for fear of spoiling the other students by her moral turpitude on the part of the management.

The moral fibre of many girls at Boarding School was destroyed who were on the threshold of their adolescence. This statement of Kamala Das is fraught with deep significance: ‘If there was a dearth of sin, sin at any cost had to be manufactured, because forgiving the sinners was a therapeutic exercise, popular with the rabidly virtuous’. (My Story, P. 48)

At long last she was delivered from the hell by her father for the place had aggravated its hate due to obnoxious ole-factory effect – ‘the meaty smell of the vegetable curry’. (My Story, P. 49) Her sense of smell was very sharp as for the sharp urine smell wafted at her father’s place caused by the urination of ‘the old chaprasi who slept in the coal-shed...’ (My Story, P. 51)

The Indian society is not monolith. True, the pageant or cavalcade of India comprising various states is colourful but despite its unity there is diversity which clashes – like the clash of civilizations. Here Kamala by using a coinage by Huntington makes a mention of culinary clash, the clash of cuisine among the various states:

The Bengali bunch ‘spread out (their lunch) on the class desks, revealed fish in a red gluey gravy, rice, fried prawns and sweets made
What was their reaction if Kamala and company walked past the room while their lunch was going on, ‘they stopped their munching and tried to hide their plates’. (My Story, P. 57)

‘Then there were orthodox Tamils who preferred to hide behind the stair cases and the bathrooms to eat the curds and rice which they had brought from their homes, a sticky mixture sprinkled with green chillies and lime... The Tamils had an inferiority complex which rose basically from this meagre diet’. (My Story, P. 57)

How minutely Das observed their dietary habits.

With pathos Kamala Das describes the plight of her English teacher. The Jewess was an Austrian refugee. Hence very poor. The girls giggled in her class. They often sprinkled ink on her impeccable, spotless clothes. When one day some girl sprinkled ink from her pen she almost burst into tears, telling the girls, ‘I am not rich like some of you’.I don’t have many sets of clothes or the money to buy such things’. The guilty girl bowed her head in shame.” (Timepass, P. 58)

Sadhu (Sanyasi) is the recurring theme of Kamala’s real life story. A Malayalam speaking, wandering mendicant (fakir) is another factual being, a real life figure, who is stranger than fiction.

The cook rightly snubbed him. But her mother melted and he was allowed to stay put. The hermit was a queer fish. He was a man of strong likes and dislikes. He was a rank communalist whose hate of Muslims was an unabated fury. His predictions were gloomy like those of an apocalyptic fortune-teller: ‘He used to make her (the maidservant) very neurotic with his gloomy predictions. (My Story, P. 65) The blighter caused
estrangement between the newly-wed couple – the maid-servant and the cook.

Like most of the sadhus and fakirs he was a drug-addict who smoked opium through his hookah. But one day he left the house on the sly like a thief as the caption of Chapter 17 speaks for itself: ‘One morning the Sanyasi had gone... Only the smell of opium remained’. That was the year 1947 – the most turbulent times when Calcutta was a simmering cauldron of communal riots between Hindus and Muslims. Especially after Jinnah’s\(^1\) slogan of Direct Action. Dr. Ahmad, Kamala’s ophthalmologist was murdered. She describes very coolly the ghastly, grisly cold-blooded murder as under: I was to go to Dr. Ahmad on a Friday at five-thirty to have my eyes tested, but on Thursday his body was cut up by some Hindus and dumped into a dustbin’. (My Story, P. 67)

She describes how once they were on tenterhooks as they were caught in the melee of Allahu Akbar\(^2\) shouting processionists. At long last the danger was averted and they heaved a sigh of relief.

Her family excessively bothered with the society’s reaction to any action of an individual. ‘A broken marriage was as distasteful, as horrifying

\(^{1}\) Jinnah: Muhammad Ali (1876-1948), Indian statesman and founder of Pakistan. He headed the Muslim League in its struggle with the Hindu oriented Indian National Congress and from 1928 onwards championed the rights of the Muslim minority at conferences on Indian independence. After 1937 when self-governing Hindu provinces began to be formed his fear that Muslims would be excluded from office led him to campaign for a separate Muslim state. With the establishment of Pakistan in 1947 he became its first Governor-General. The Oxford English Reference Dictionary Oxford New York, 1995 (P. 760)

\(^{2}\) God is great. The war cry of the Muslims.
as an attack of leprosy’. She was thankful to God for not ‘listening to the dictates of her conscience’ and severing her social marital relations with her husband. The result would have been devastating and disastrous for her. (My Story, P. 102)

Though not an anthropologist herself, Kamala Das keenly studied human beings to depict them in her stories which were then published in the Matrubhumi magazine. She proudly says, ‘I liked to study people, for I love them tremendously’. (My Story, P. 125) When her husband told her Parsi doctor Mr. Masani that Kamala is writing stories about the Parsi people, doctor with a banter warned her that if his people take note of it they would take her to task. In an aside Kamala’s comment was, ‘How little he knew of the tenderness with which I approached each of my characters’. (My Story, P. 125)

Her study and observation of human beings is very keen. When the fellow passenger in a plane knows that the poem he was reading from the prestigious magazine The Illustrated Weekly of India was written by Kamala Das sitting beside him he was so much impressed that he offered his typewriter to her as a gift. She declined on the ground that he was a stranger.

‘But every friend was once a stranger, he said, displaying smile shabbied by yellow, uneven teeth’. (My Story, P. 126)

How under one pretext or the other foul-minded male tried to touch a woman’s body, Kamala writes with disgust.

At Banker’s Conference in Bombay a man with a Spanish blood ‘One day... began to massage the back of my neck...’ (My Story, P. 144)

To get an opportunity to kiss her he would exhort her husband, ‘Bring her a glass of water Das, he said to my husband, and when he was
away, I was kissed gently on my cheeks’. (My Story, P. 144)

Similarly, ‘There was Carlo, the dark-haired young man who loved me enough to want to marry me... (My Story, P. 144)

Someone began to ring her from public booths saying ‘Hallo, I love you’. What did Kamala do to him? ‘I called him over to my house and he said apologetically that he was reminded of his wife whenever he looked at me and that I ought to forgive him his audacity’. (My Story, P. 145)

She forgave him because forgiving was so very easy for a girl as vain and happy as I was those days’. (My Story, P. 145)

How the society goes to dogs is depicted in the description of cocktail parties of Calcutta. The Chapter entitled ‘Calcutta's Cocktail Season’ gives a morbid image of women who are the pathetic victims of sexual exploitation in such cocktail parties. See the irony of the whole scenario: ‘The rich enjoy being introduced to the Government wives’ and to those who are still young and fresh’. Government wives means wives of Government servants.

‘And after the fool has had a drink or two, the rich man gets closer, overpowers the girl... with leers and whispers, how beautiful your rosy cheeks are today, your beauty is a feast for my starving eyes! She will begin to drink more and more not because she likes it but only to spite him (husband) for having brought her to the accursed party’.

When she bends over the wash basin in the bathroom ‘.... The host or some other lustful man will appear at her side in a trice to rub her back... He will touch all the soft portions of her body, accidentally’. (My Story, P. 149)

The husband has passed out after drinking too much. An army will be required to raise him from the sofa. ‘Therefore giving up all the hope,
the girl will sit somewhere, tears filling her eyes, while tender-hearted men (mark the irony!) paw her and woo into her ears’. (My Story, P. 149) The society had turned morbid morally. The sequel was, ‘it was from Calcutta that I lost my faith in the essential goodness of human beings’. (My Story, P. 149)

True to her nature as a poet she was very sensitive. She says ‘I was emotional and oversensitive. Whenever a snatch of unjustified scandal concerning my emotional life reached me through well-meaning relatives I wept like a wounded child for hours, rolling on my bed and often took sedatives to put myself to sleep’. (My Story, P. 157)

The human society at large is galore with old men, the sugar daddies who are queer and quaint. Kamala Das met some of such characters whose depiction in 'My Story' is not void of interest. She makes mention of one such fellow:

‘...There was a book-shop (at Free School Street). I picked up some gilded volumes of Lawrence Hope from that shop and presented them to the man I used to be infatuated with but he was so conventional, so cowardly that he went out immediately to buy in return two volumes of Stafean¹ (sic) Zweig to return the favour, to be nearly ‘quits’. (My Story P. 158 parentheses mine).

She compares Carlo with this man: 'Wasn’t Carlo better bred than the man who did not know how to accept a gift graciously.' But Carlo had always a grouse with Das: 'You don’t love me at all... I am only a waiting room between trains’. (My Story, P. 158)

1. Stefan Zweig the German novelist and short story writer, who along with his wife committed suicide during the World War II
The society especially the non-writers treat a writer as a pariah. Kamala observes: 'Wherever a writer goes her notoriety (not fame!) precedes her. The non-writers do not normally trust the writers. This is because they are entirely dissimilar, except in appearance'. (My Story, P. 175)

In comparison with the non-writers they are like eagles whereas the non-writers are like land birds.

Elucidating her point she says:

'The essence of the writer eludes the non-writer. All that the writer reveals to such people are her oddities of dress and her emotional excesses'. (My Story, P. 175)

The result is that writers avoid the non-writers: '... the writer shies away from the invisible hostility and clings to her own type, those dreaming ones'. (My Story, P. 176)

And consequently 'As I wrote more and more... I became lonelier and lonelier'. (My Story, P. 176)

It will be worth our while to mention Kamala’s observation that how the society of the rich behaved with their own flesh and blood. While she was undergoing treatment for Leukaemia at the Bombay Hospital ‘In the adjacent room was a little child suffering from meningitis who uttered harsh bird cries intermittently...... I asked her (the nurse) why the child’s parents were not around to comfort him. She laughed a mirthless laugh.

‘They are rich’, she said, they will not be able to sleep in the hospital’. (My Story, P. 178)

At last the child succumbed to his fatal disease, death had taken its toll, as Kamala Das recounts: 'All through the night I heard the shrill cry of the child but a little before I fell asleep... 'The child expired at four’, she
It reflects upon the callousness of the rich section of the society but not all rich people are as heartless as the parents of the child suffering from meningitis.

In chapter 44 Das has penned her reminiscences of Bangladesh war. She ‘considered Bangladesh a pain in the neck. We knew that helping them would fracture our economy and win for us only fleeing praise from the international scene’. (My Story, P. 190)

At the hindsight we judge that she was right for Bangladesh who is beholden to us for her freedom is our arch-enemy. For blood is thicker than water – she doesn’t consider us nearer. All our sacrifices have gone in vain. At the time of its birth it was rightly said the mother is in trouble here and the baby is in trouble there. During the recent U.P. elections Rahul Gandhi blurted out that it was the Gandhi family who broke up Pakistan carving Bangladesh out of it. ¹

She also expresses sympathy for the poor roofless paupers of Bombay. Under the bad influence of west charity is discouraged whereas, ‘Charity is India’s ancient tradition’. (My Story, P. 190)

She blames newspapers for the callousness towards the poor-- they report bad deeds whereas ‘the good deeds are never reported’. (My Story, P. 191)

She was no more fit for sex yet in his (husband’s) eyes 'even my broken down doll of a body was attractive.' (My Story, P. 191)

---

¹ The exact quote of Rahul Gandhi runs as: “Once my family decides on something it doesn’t go back. Whether it is about India’s freedom or dividing Pakistan.” The Weekly Newsmagazine Outlook, New Delhi, October 15, 2007, (P. 162)
She proves her lack of sexual desire with the image of a snake which sheds its slough: ‘I had shed carnal desire as a snake might shed its skin’. (My Story, P. 191)

Her writings aroused sex in men who rang her up for sex. Defending herself she asserts, ‘I was never a nymphomaniac’. (My Story, P. 192)

Kamala Das ‘was a favourite with the students of my home-state who supported my plea for a new kind of morality’. But she was starkly hated by her relatives who thought her a threat to their respectability. (My Story, P. 199)

They were the part and parcel of the accursed feudal system’ and had their horrible ‘skeletons in the cupboard of the past’, who sexually exploited 'the tender daughters of their serfs and retainers'. (My Story, P. 200)

They feared her as one fears a watchdog. They were afraid that she would write about their black deeds and “of the accidental deaths in the locality” an allusion to the deaths of pregnant virgins out of illegitimate sex-relations. She was not sparing to write about “the true immortality which takes shelter nowhere else but in the robust arms of our society”. Mark how caustic, mordant and stinging is her satire of the rich landed gentry of her neighbourhood.

Their complaint to her parents about her proved futile for ‘I had become a truth addict and that I loved my writing more than I loved them or my own sons’ (My Story, P. 200)

They came to see her, ‘like sick hounds’ to derive sadistic pleasure by looking askance at her but she was ridden of them with the help of her servant. (My Story, P. 200)

Her enemies subjected her to their sorcery and black magic –
burying an “urn somewhere in my yard hoping to kill me.” Not confined to this they threw on the ledge of the well a decapitated cat” with her “name engraved on a copper piece, an egg, some turmeric” and “vermillion (sic) stuffed inside its body” – all the paraphernalia of a practising sorcerer. (My Story, P. 201)

To pay them in the same coin – to show that an intellectual cannot lag behind in matching with their machination and to retaliate and scare them away Kamala “too hung a picture of Kali on the wall of my balcony. To scare them away and strike terror and horror in them she “adorned it daily with long strings of red flowers, resembling the intestines of a disembowelled human being.” (My Story, P. 201)

To make the matters worse they tried to administer poison by bribing two servants – but as they did it reluctantly and half-heartedly as they had eaten her salt, she saw the relief on the culprit servant’s countenances “when I came downstairs in the morning alive and more or less normal’. (My Story, P. 201)

Despite her confidence ‘Not even Mrs. Grundy \(^2\) would have found fault with my morals but the villagers talked in whispers of my lovers’. It turned out devastating for her when “one night, I collapsed with a heart attack. Her brother Mohandas came from Calicut, to carry me to a nursing home’. (My Story, P. 202)

She was optimistic that she would not die – the raison d'etre for the hope was her son whose existence boosted her hope in such words: ‘This beautiful child was not to be left motherless’. (My Story, P. 202) Her optimism is commendable.

1. Vermilion not vermillion
   
2. See the cross reference on P. 35 of this thesis.
The sign of 'No Visitors' on her medical-ward kept even the death at bay. Still she had a hallucination that ‘it (death) came to me disguised as a wood-pecker and began to peck at my bones. Then it changed itself into a water-fowl...’ (My Story, P. 202)

She was hardly recuperated than her eldest son caught measles. She was scared to see her son who ‘stared at me with unseeing eyes mottled by red veins’. (My Story, P. 205)

She recounts ‘I grew panicky and soon was so demoralized that I took my maid’s advice and summoned a sorcerer to find out if our enemies were bringing us such misfortunes’. (My Story, P. 205)

'The sorcerer came....He gave me three strings one for my wrist and the others for my sons. They have done Mahamaran to kill you, he said....' (My Story, P. 205)

Despite highly educated, enlightened and an intellectual Kamala Das had faith in incredulous beliefs such as magic, sorcery and mumbo-jumbo.

She declares the writer’s credo that “The writer has none to love her but the readers.” (My Story, P. 206)

A writer becomes ‘a mere embarrassment to the members of her family, for she is like a goldfish in a well-lit bowl whose movements are never kept concealed’. (My Story, P. 206)

The image of goldfish in a well-lit bowl is a highly imaginative and ingenious image coined by Kamala Das. After all she is a poet.

She believes that her readers follow her everywhere like an omnipresent God – encountering her everywhere.

She writes, ‘I have felt their eyes on me right from my adolescence when I published my first story... Like the eyes of an all-seeing God they follow me through the years’. (My Story, P. 206)
She had developed telepathy. Hence “sensed the secret hostility” of someone who did not like her ‘hence withdrew my head into my closed quilt and remained in my closed bedroom...’ (My Story, P. 207)

She avoided hostile visitors for she was a lover of peace. Knowing her limitations she avoided ‘meddling in grave matters’.

She was a misfit as a housewife. Even for lifting a teapot she needed an effort and gasped in the exercise. But writing was effortless... ‘And it certainly brought me happiness’. (My Story, P. 207)

Her Communist friends ask her with a chagrin, ‘What I have done in my life for the common man?’ Her answer is mum’s the word as she says, ‘I remain silent’. (My Story, P. 210)

Then she depicts the picture of a poor mad, young woman -- the perennial social problem of a society.

She wonders ‘whose daughter is she? Where has she misplaced her parents? On some mornings she appears naked... We throw her a housecoat or a saree which she accepts without once looking up to see the giver, nonchalantly, as though she had expected the sky to rain down on her head only the soft garments’. (My Story, P. 210)

She observes society and the social conflicts around her with the keen eyes of a writer. Mark this observation: ‘I watch the little boys of the poor crowding round the bhelwala’s handcart, only to have the pleasure of watching the richer ones eat’. (My Story, P. 210) Perhaps such
scenes made Carl Marx\textsuperscript{1} to propound his theory of Communism.

She interprets the theory of fatalism – the same fatalism on which Hardy’s\textsuperscript{2} novels are based – with a new angle as she observes the contentment of the poor in the following lines: “The poor are fatalists by nature and by tradition. Or else where would we be now... The poor would have risen like a locust storm and devoured us by now; they would have picked our over-ripened flesh from the bones and left us in scraps on the garbage heaps’. (My Story P. 21)

Theory of have-nots overtaking the haves for Kamala Das it is ‘The writing on the wall’. (My Story P. 211)

She is a socialist who dreams of ‘organizing a campaign to collect a rupee from every middle class home’ for constructing houses for slum

\textsuperscript{1} Carl Marx: Marx, Karl Heinrich (1818-83). German political philosopher and economist, resident in England from 1849. The founder of modern communism with Engels, he collaborated with him in the writing of Communist Manifesto (1848). Thereafter Marx spent much of his time enlarging the theory of this pamphlet into a series of books the most important being the three volume Das Kapital. The first Volume of this appeared in 1867. And the remainder was completed by Engels and published after Marx’s death (1885-1894) Marx was also a leading figure in the founding of the First International (1864). Oxford English Reference Dictionary, Oxford New York, 1995, (P. 886)

\textsuperscript{2} Thomas Hardy: (1840-1948) English novelist and poet. He spent most of his life in his native Dorset (The Wessex’ of his novels). A recurrent theme in Hardy’s work is the struggle of the human beings against the indifferent for that inflicts the sufferings and ironies of life. Major novels include The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886); Tess of The D’urberviles (1891) and Jude the Obscure (1896) He turned to writing poetry in the late 1890’s and published eight volumes of poems, as well as a drama in blank verse, The Dynasts (1904-8) (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, Ed. Judy Pearsall & Bill Trumble Oxford New York, 1995. P. 641)
dwellers ‘to see their children grow up healthy and without that hopelessness dimming their young eyes’. (My Story P. 211)

She also “dreams of starting a residential school based on the Grukul system in the capacity of ‘President of the Jyotsna Arts and Education Society.”

But her grouse is that ‘Nobody comes forward to turn these dreams to reality. The world outside my house is always so busy’. (My Story P. 211)

Kamala Das was a witness to the reclamation of land from sea at Cuffe Parade in Bombay – receding hairline and “on the land reclaimed tall buildings were constructed.” (My Story, P. 212)

The builders live in the make-shift “huts made of mud-bricks” – perhaps she fumbled for the word adobe but passed muster with mud-bricks and corrugated iron, on the precincts of the construction site.

Ganpati festival is celebrated with fanfare and ostentatious flourish in Maharashtra. She draws a picture of the revellers during the Ganesh festival: ‘Some of them use little cymbals of brass and clang-clang again (she grope for the expression “clashing the cymbals”) to the tune of the hymns while the round-eyed squat on the ground and watch in admiration’. (My Story, P. 213 parentheses mine)

But the rich, the patrician, the aristocrats could not brook even such ‘plebeian exuberance’ as her phraseology goes, “to spoil their tranquil hours.” The rich grudge the poor, the labourers such innocuous pleasures because ‘They wish to have their evening whisky in peace, talking of books and love affairs and office promotions’. (My Story, P. 213)

She looks at their revelry with the eyes of the rich and the middle-class: “The poor are bad singers. Their voices grate as though the dust of
their surroundings have (sic)\textsuperscript{1} entered their throats and their lungs’. (My Story P. 213)

But no power on earth can stop them. And mark this ingenious (not ingenuous) imagery the product of her fertile imagination: ‘The song rises like a tired snake who has finally reconciled itself to its destiny which is to uncurl (uncoil?) out of the snake-charmer’s basket and sway’. (My Story P. 213 parentheses mine)

See the contrast as she juxtaposes the riff-raff’s song with the sophisticated, “cultured voices discussed poetry inside the drawing room,” ‘I heard that song and sensed the joy of the singers’. (My Story, P. 214)

As she could no more suppress the urge to join them, she drags her husband to the venue. ‘The reaction is picturesquely depicted in these words:

‘The people on the platform dipped their voices when they saw us enter... The singers became self-conscious for a while but then they relaxed to sing as loud as before’. (My Story, P. 214)

How large hearted were the poor: “We were outsiders but we were anyway welcome. How happily the children smiled at us. Sit down said one of the organizers....’

She, in all, humility asks the rhetorical question: ‘Who were we to sit beside their favourite God. I felt humbled by their goodwill’. (My Story, P. 214)

The poor labourers – ‘men and women, working from morning till dusk carrying cement and climbing the scaffoldings’ were Kamala’s envy


defnote{Have- it should be ‘has’.}
for ‘They had more vitality than I had and more of optimism’. (My Story, P. 214)

Very cleverly and ingeniously she personifies her gloom with a dog – as a writer compares the evening with a labrador: the labrador evening – when she says ‘My gloom in its littlest corner like a black dog’. (My Story, P. 214)

She packs philosophy in a string of words: ‘If we were to forget the words past, present and future and were to see life as a collage, a vast assembly of things and people and emotions we will stop grieving for dead, stop pining for the living and stop accumulating visible wealth.’ (My Story, P. 214)

She believes that ‘Nothing has an end. Instead of an end all that we suffer is a discomposition’. She comes to the conclusion: ‘We are trapped in immortality and our only freedom is the freedom to discompose’. (My Story, P. 215)

One day when a doctor, a family friend alarmed her out of all proportions to admit herself to an Intensive Cardiac Unit, she remained nonchalant and insouciant for she “was no stranger to many signals of warning. But going once again to the hospital was an unpleasant prospect’. (My Story, P. 217)

She regarded hospital ‘like a sandwich filling between the familiar earth and the strange domain of death’.

How she philosophises illness is interesting to note: ‘Illness has become my mate bound by ties of blood and nerves and bone, and, I hold with it long secret conversations’. (My Story, P. 257)

How she feels when in a hospital the clothes are taken off, mark: ‘Along with your clothes, which the nurse took off, was removed your
personality-traits... every vestige of your false dignity is thus removed’. (My Story, P. 218) Only a literary genius can compare things so philosophically and with such imagery.

What vicarious sexual pleasure a hospital menial, here for example a ward boy, derives, she minutely observes: ‘In the X-ray room another nurse un wraps your body while the ward boy who wheeled you in watches furtively from the dark. The display of the breasts is the legitimate reward for his labour’. (My Story, P. 218) Instead of chastising the ward-boy for his transgression she calls it ‘the legitimate reward for his labour’.

She scoffs at the doctor’s instruction to take a deep breath – if she could why she should be here instead of ‘walking hand in hand with your little son or seeing a film or picnicking under a fragrant tree’. (My Story, P. 218)

She asserts, “It is not that I am afraid of the injections and the drips and all the rest, I said. It is just that I have stopped fearing death. (My Story, P. 218)

People generally are afraid of death but Kamala has her own philosophy of death. She observes ‘I have come to believe that life is a mere dream and that death is the only reality... Life has been... as ineffectual as writing on moving water. We have been mere participants in someone else’s dream’. (My Story, P. 218)

Like death she has her own philosophy of God as she says, ‘I liken God to a tree’. (My Story, P. 218) Despite various parts – leaf, bark, fruit, flower – are different in shape and colour, they are one in essence. She concludes, ‘Each of us shall obey that colossal wisdom, the taproot of all wisdom and the source of all consciousness’. (My Story, P. 218)

The colourful youth is left behind. What about her pleasures? She
likens it to a cocktail: ‘Perhaps I mixed my pleasures as carelessly as I mixed my drinks and passed out too soon on the couch of life... My heart resembles a cracked platter that can no more hold anything’. (My Story, P. 219)

She thinks she will die soon. Her jewellery, books, the bronze idols shall remain and endure but not her body.

From her pyre her ‘grieving sons shall pick up little souvenirs of bones and some ash. And yet the world shall go on. Tears shall dry on my sons’ cheeks’. But her consolation is that ‘My descendants shall populate this earth. It is enough for me. It is more than enough...’ She is contented with it. (My Story, P. 219)

The social and cultural conflict had reared its head even in the childhood of Kamala Das. In an English convent school her and her brother’s lives were made miserable. She recounts: ‘My brother was plump and dark. His eyes were bright and circular. Although he was the cleverest in his class the white boys made fun of him and tortured him by pushing a pointed pencil up his nostril. One day his shirt-front was covered with blood. He was stunned by the cruelty but even the tears seemed inhibited, staying suspended on his lashes while William the bully exclaimed, Blackie your blood is red!’ I scratched his face in a mad rage but was soon overpowered by the tough Anglo-Indians...’ (My Story, P. 2)

During the Raj days an undeclared apartheid policy, discrimination on the racial basis – was followed especially by the Anglo-Indians and British citizens.

Whenever a special guest or a VVIP came to school, it was the girl Shirley – a Scot who carried up the bouquet. Even child Kamala’s poems were credited as written by Shirley.... When the visitor asked who wrote it,
our principal said, ‘Shirley, of course...’ (My Story, P. 2) Kamala being a precocious child started writing poems since an early age.

The principal boasted of Shirley (who read the poem by Kamala) as a combination of beauty and brains (though she was a beauty sans brains). Then there was from the Governor’s wife a special kiss’. Thus the children were subject to discrimination in an institution run by the white masters. What a harmful impression it might have been produced on the impressionable minds of the brown Indian children. The inferiority complex was rammed into their psyche from the very childhood.

Social conflict in Nayantara Sahgal’s life:

N.T. Sahgal is proud at her mother’s holding the envious position of a minister – first woman in the country while it was not even independent. She observes, ‘a woman touring cholera-ridden districts and famine areas and doing work such as no woman had ever done before, that some were still unconvinced that it was true’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 74)

She argues that ‘... The concept of the equality of men and women was not foreign to Indian thought... it had, nevertheless, existed since ancient times when a wife had been a man’s honoured and equal partner’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 74)

The Sanskrit word *ardhangini* was self-explanatory for this equality for *ardhangini* meant ‘half the being’. Thus without his half-being man is not complete.

Gandhi strengthened this concept of equality. Indian women didn’t need to fight for their right to vote i.e. suffragette as their western counterpart had to do. Sahgal asserts, ‘Indian women did not have to march in suffragette processions to proclaim their equality with men or don bloomers in place of their feminine garb’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake,
P. 75) To assert their equality with men and show the emancipation 'women brought about a change in their appearance. Short skirts and cropped hair became the order of the day. But the appearance of the Indian women has on the whole remained unaltered'. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 75)

Most of the Indian women, irrespective of caste and creed, wear saris and sport long hair.

In her autobiography ‘Prison and Chocolate Cake’ Sahgal regales her readers with the colourful wedding ceremonies.

In the chapter 8, ‘Wedding Story’ while describing the marriage ceremony of Indira Gandhi who weds Feroze Gandhi, she inter alia recounts the wedding accounts of the other ladies of Nehru family viz. her Mummie and Masi- Krishna Hutheesingh. She says, ‘The traditional Hindu wedding is a sumptuous affair’. The pandit is consulted for the auspicious time for it. A Hindu doesn’t do anything in a hurry i.e without consulting the Hindu priest. To justify it Sahgal says, ‘The Indian temperament is averse from (sic) haste…’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 100)

The proper word for initiating auspiciously is ‘mahurat’. March was the month in 1942 found auspicious for wedding. The groom Feroze Gandhi was not to come from outside for his family lived in Allahabad itself. ‘Music is part of the wedding scene’. Traditionally it is shahanai. Though beautiful melody emanates through shahanai but according to Sahgal, rather mournful strains introduce the only melancholy note in the gaiety’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 101) But music could not be played the whole day because of circumstantial restrictions.

1. averse is followed by ‘to’ not ‘from’
But it was not so at her Mummie’s wedding which took place in 1921. “It followed the conventional pattern,” with ‘lavish feasting of hundreds of guests who must have given full scope to Nanuji’s fabled extravagance’.

Her jewellery was fabulous ‘fit for a princess’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 102)

‘Besides this elaborate personal trousseau, Mummie was given linen, furniture and silver articles... for her new home a car and not least, a horse’. Interestingly, ‘She had been taught to ride as a child and had inherited her father’s love of horses’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 102) Her description of her father is fantastic: ‘Sitting beside her in the picture, Papu looks like a fairytale prince in a brocade achkan and churidar-pyjama with a gauzy Benaras safa wound jauntily round his head’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 103)

But in contrast to Vijayalakshmi’s marriage, Masi Krishna Hutheesingh was a subdued affair Nanuji (Motilal Nehru had died in 1930. Her wedding (was) a short and simple affair ...it bore no resemblance to gay and glamorous Kashmiri weddings which took place in Allahabad’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 103)

Thus at the wedding of poor Masi (Krishna Hutheesingh), ‘The tradition had been side-stepped to so great an extent as to dispense with all ritual’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 104)

For Indira’s wedding they received myriads of gifts. But ‘Most of these presents had to be returned to the senders, for in many cases they were from people whom the family did not know’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 104) According to her father, wedding was not the exclusive affair of the couple, it was more than that... their dedication to the community
as well’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 104)

The joy was not pure. It was tinged with the tragedy of Kamala Nehru’s death. Hence only Nehru, her father was there to perform Kanyadan – giving the bride’s hand in the hand of the groom. She was ‘in shell-pink khadi sari spun by her father and edged with delicate silver embroidery’. (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 105)

Fire was accommodated for it was a ‘symbol of purity’. After Kanyadan Nehru’s role was over. He rose and stood on one side. The couple ‘stood up hand in hand to perform the sapt padi (saat phere), the seven steps (circles) round the fire...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 107 parentheses mine) Then everyone showered the bride with flower-petals. According to Sahgal’s father marriage... was more than love and companionship between two people... it was the continuing fulfilment of a cosmic design...’ (Prison and Chocolate Cake, P. 107)

The couple moved into a little house. But just 6 months after the marriage Indira and Feroze were arrested for indulging in non-cooperation movement. The British were ‘no respecters of young people’ who were just married.

Social Conflict in Tehmina’s Life:

According to Tehmina Durrani, to a civilized society ‘The feudal is accessible only in romantic novels’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 45)

Her feudal lord, ‘Mustafa Khar comes from ‘Kaharral’ tribe of Punjab’. They are originally ‘Rajputs’ who now style themselves as Jats’ but originally are Rajput converts to Islam. They spread around Bahawalpur, Sahiwal, Jallundar and Multan districts of the Punjab.

According to Elephinstone’s account, ‘In tribulation and courage they (the Kharrals) have always been known to excel all the other except the
Khatias...’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 245)

‘They trace their ancestry from one Bhupa who was a descendent of Raja Karan who settled in Uch and was converted to Islam by Makhdoom Shah Jahanian’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 245)

Ahmad Khan Kharral, their most celebrated leader, was killed in 1857 by a detachment under Captain Black’. He headed the combined tribes. ‘Their chief object was the plunder of Hindu and Khatris.” Elephinstone\(^1\) quotes a Persian proverb: ‘The Dogar, The Bhatti, The Wattu and The Kharral are all rebellious and ought to be slain’. (My Feudal Lord, PP. 245, 246)

Another orientalist Lepel Griffin writes about the Kharrals: ‘Through all of history the Kharrals have been a turbulent, savage and thievish tribe’, ever impatient of control and delighting in strife and plunder’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 247)

He counted them ‘More fanatic than the other Mohammedan tribes...’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 247)

How the Khar branch of Kharrals got its name reads like a joke. Once a party of Kharrals encamped in a sugarcane field. They cut the sugarcane and fed their cattle on precious sugarcane: When the owner of the field complained, they showing their innocence admitted that they took sugarcane as an ordinary fodder.

At his asking who they were their proud answer was ‘Kharrals’.

‘You are not Kharrals, you are ‘khars’ which means ass in Persian’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 247) pat came the answer. Since then the name Khars was stuck to them. But no more pejorative or derogatory.

\(^1\) Elphinstone quoted by Tehmina Durrani in My Feudal Lord. (P. 246)
The famous love story of the folklore hero and his love Mirza Saheban like Laila Majnoon is associated with the Khars. For the congenital lovers belonged to the Khar tribe. (My Feudal Lord, P. 247)

‘The Khar wives brought even villages in dowry. Sanawan is one such village after the name of one of Mustafa’s grandfather’s wives named Sanawan.

Mustafa’s mother hailed from city of Multan. The tribe was notorious for girl infanticide. Mustafa’s mother was no exception to the rule. Rashida was the only daughter who was subjected to all sort of oppression and repression like some latter day Cinderella. (My Feudal Lord, P. 249).

Even in today’s Pakistan “women were treated like commodities. Their function was to work, clean, cook, bear children, to be used for pleasure and be beaten. They had no rights only duties.” (My Feudal Lord, P. 249)

The Khars were great hunters; they would hunt anything from partridge to snake’... They were blood thirsty’. And in the absence of animals they trained their guns on men’. Their hobby or pastime was to wring the neck of a chicken,

‘they delighted in watching the headless bird flutter about in agony’ for their ‘Thirst for blood was unquenchable’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 250)

Marriages and morals -- Tehmina comments on the marriages in her family. How the bride was chosen:

---

1 Cinderella: a character in many traditional European fairy tales (including one by Charles Perrault), a girl neglected or exploited as a servant by her family but enabled by a fairy godmother to attend a royal ball. She meets and captivates Prince charming but has to flee at midnight leaving the prince to identify her by the glass slipper which she leaves behind’. (The Oxford English Reference Dictionary, Oxford New York, 1995, PP. 263, 64)
“Weddings and social gatherings were usually glorified marriage marts where women bartered the future of their daughters. Eligible bachelors were shown girls who could end up being their wives. There were few occasions for meeting openly. Everything was hidden. We conversed with our eyes. (My Feudal Lord, P. 181)

‘I was at a wedding in Lahore. I met Anees Khan... A lot of mothers of young men were eyeing me up. I could feel it. I felt their scrutiny and their interest’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 181)

Thus she was selected at first sight by both Anees’ her would-be life-partner and his mother as Tehmina puts it: ‘Anees’s mother was also present and very taken by me’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 187)

Her son Anees was bold enough who ‘came up to me and chatted’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 181)

Thus overtures began. Anees frequented Murree School to see Tehmina. Love letters were also exchanged but the mother threw a spanner for she thought Anees was beneath their status, their social stratum, even after betrothal as Tehmina puts it, ‘She broke off the engagement’. But Tehmina was adamant to marry Anees.

‘I told my mother that I would marry none but Anees’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 184)

Tehmina’s family passed through very adverse circumstances after the change of regime resulted by the break-up of Pakistan. ‘One of the first actions that Bhutto took after taking over President was to dismiss my father... My father was arrested and sent to jail’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 185)

Shakespeare says ‘Sweet are the uses of adversity’. But it was not so in Durrani’s case. As they were not politicians they could not turn the stigma of incarceration to their political mileage. So to hide their face, after
her father’s release they left for the States.

As they left for U.S. Tehmina was married. She says ‘I was an unhappy bride’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 186)

The social conflict in Tehmina’s life began with the entry of Mustafa in her life. His was a very powerful but deleterious influence not only on her life but also on the lives of her family especially her sister Adila’s. Tehmina first describes his entry into her life in the Chapter 6 My Feudal Lord: ‘Mustafa Khar had entered our lives. Our lives began to orbit around this man’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 191)

Slowly but surely he mesmerized Tehmina so much so that she became not only estranged from Anees, her husband, but poor fellow was forced to divorce Tehmina.

Soon he fascinated Tehmina as a snake fascinates a bird. He married her thus making her his fourth wife. First, his cousin Wazir, second Safia, an airhostess. He married her because, ‘Airhostesses are mysterious. They are highly romanticised glamour dolls’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 197) Third Naubahar, ‘a professional dancing girl’. ‘She was from Heera Mandi’. The red-light district of Lahore. Mr Bhutto forced Mustafa to divorce Naubahar for it was utterly against the decorum and propriety that a prostitute, a hooker should stay in the Governor House as the wife and spouse of the governor.

Another bad news that he received was about his wife Safia. One of his brothers informed him, ‘your wife has had an illicit relationship ‘with your younger brother…’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 200) The incest, it seemed was a family streak. Mustafa had open illicit relations with Adila, his sister-in-law.
So ‘He beat Safia mercilessly. It is said that he inserted chillie (sic)\(^1\) powder into her...’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 200)

Tehmina comments ‘The feudal law allows a man all this’. (My Feudal Lord, P.200). Even Bhutto suggested in complete seriousness..., ‘I say why don’t you bump her off’.

Even if he kills Safia ‘it is not a crime. You have committed a crime of passion... He decided to divorce Safia, instead’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 201)

Mustafa was short of marrying ‘the niece of Saadia Pirzada, wife of Hafeez Pirzada, Mr Butto’s education minister’. Then ‘Shaharzad stumbled across the spot-light... he felt that Sherry (Shahrazad) filled the bill. (My Feudal Lord, P. 201)

Mustafa often beat her up and behaved insultingly “She had been installed in Governor’s house.” But in fact ‘She was now a prisoner’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 2004)

Mustafa was a different ‘kettle of fish’. Tehmina says: “Politicians as a rule are circumspect... Mustafa was an exception. His marriages and divorces were not confined to drawing room gossips. They were known in the bazaars and in the alleys of the country’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 206)

Mustafa was ‘The man who had a reputation of being an incorrigible womaniser’ as Tehmina put it. (My Feudal Lord, P. 207)

He was no better than Rasputin, the Russian debauch, notorious for being dissolute and licentious...

---

In the book she called him Rasputin. Tehmina writes, ‘I was quite embarrassed going back with the man I had described in print as Rasputin’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 43)

Poor Anees was made an unwittingly cuckold by keeping at the swimming pool at the governor house whereas Mustafa was having whale of a time with his wife Tehmina, the autobiographer. (My Feudal Lord, P. 210)

At another occasion poor Anees is sent to Peshawar on a top-secret mission. Tehmina, to avoid Mustafa’s clutches – goes to a God-forsaken, back-of-the-beyond place called ‘Kasowal, in the interior of Punjab’. But the governor scoured her there and forced her to return to Lahore on the plea, ‘I cant live without you’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 211)

All this adventurism was for a woman. In Tehmina’s words, ‘No one knew he had venture into the wilds, for a woman’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 211)

While enjoying Tehmina’s company in the Governor’s House, as a red-herring for Sherry ‘He had told her that he was entertaining the ‘ulema’ downstairs. ‘Ulema’ read stag party in Pakistan’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 212)

---

1. Rasputin Grigori Efimovich (1871-1916). Russian Monk. He came to exert great influence over Tsar Nicholas II and his family during the First World War by claiming miraculous to heal the heir to the throne who suffered from haemophilia. His appropriation of ecclesiastical, political and military powers combined with a reputation for debauchery steadily discredited the imperial family. Rasputin was eventually assassinated by a group loyal to the Tsar. The Oxford English Reference Dictionary Ed. By Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble. Oxford, New York – OUP 1995. (P. 1197)

2. The stag party means all male party.
When the things got out of hands for Sherry who plainly told Tehmina, ‘Get out of my life, get out of his life. ‘...He is not good for you. He’ll ruin your life’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 213)

How prophetic were Sherry’s words.

But he made Sherry to implore to Tehmina to join the group again. Sherry’s heart bled but she had to toe the line of her dictatorial and despotic husband.

Eyebrows were raised: “What was she doing with Mustafa Khar. She’s only 22. Her husband was away in Singapore’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 218)

She brazenly told Anees that our marriage was over...

‘I wanted a divorce’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 219). Anees’s reaction was cool and civilized. ‘He told me that he would grant me a divorce’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 219) Anees’s mother blamed Anees only for not being possessive of his wife. He was being blamed for exposing me to a ‘bad man’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 220)

Tehmina was no more a maverick. Mustafa brought infamy to her. ‘Mustafa Khar had branded me. I carried his stamp... There was no way of removing the brand except through marriage’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 222)

She recounts how they were married. ‘We went to Mustafa’s village Kot Addu and there in complete secrecy, on the 25th of July 1976 a trusted ‘Qazi’ married us’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 222)

Writing about Mustafa’s waywardness and fickle-mindedness, Tehmina writes: ‘Mustafa was too impulsive to allow my life to settle into a routine’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 223)

They moved into the big house. Mustafa and his two wives’.
'He was a coarse man’. He suffered from inferiority complex. ‘His hatred for the elite took precedence’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 224)

He didn’t care for the absurdity that the dinner parties were attended by ‘all three of us’. But Sherry didn’t mind it. She would insist on making it a happy threesome’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 225)

Tehmina winced and shuddered to see Mustafa caning Sherry’s son Abdul Rahman 19 years old till the stick was broken on his back only for the peccadillo of smoking. He began to appear to Tehmina in his true colours. Tehmina very beautifully puts it: ‘Mustafa was beginning to peel off his make-up’. About herself her comment is:

‘I felt like one of his serfs’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 227)

He was waiting for an excuse to divorce Sherry. Her baby-son died of pneumonia which was a good excuse for him. As Tehmina puts it: ‘The baby’s death was the last straw.¹ Mustafa went to see her and gave her the divorce papers. (My Feudal Lord, P. 227)

A man of weird nature once he asked details of Tehmina’s wedding night with Anees. Then waxing furious he beat her beyond recognition. (My Feudal Lord, P. 229)

Tehmina puts it, ‘A masochistic pleasure was being derived from the graphic details I was forced to describe’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 229)

When she chanced to look up at the mirror on top of the sink; I could see a horribly mauled face. A mangled shadow of myself’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 229)

---

¹ ‘Tis the last straw that breaks the camel’s back’. There is an ultimate point of endurance beyond which calamity breaks a man down. (Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable London, Cassell and Company, Ltd. (P. 869)
Mustafa was no better than Sardanapalus,¹ notorious for sensuality and tyranny.

After this brutal incident, Tehmina says, ‘My love for the man had turned into fear’. About her marriage with Mustafa she says, ‘It was rooted in unmitigated fear’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 232)

The brutal aspect of Mustafa’s character came to fore when he insisted their newborn daughter Naseeba’s head to be put in ‘head-trap’. Because of its tightness, poor baby ‘would wail all night’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 240)

Tehmina says ‘I was very frightened to learn Mustafa’s atrocious behaviour with Amna, Sherry’s daughter.’

‘If the poor baby howled while her parents were asleep, Mustafa would pick her up and shove her under the bed!

He was only interested in his own peace of mind’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 240)

Once Tehmina accompanied her mother to Nawab Sadiq Hussain’s house. Mustafa had set a deadline for 10-30 p.m. As they were detained in the party they came late. Mustafa was waiting to pounce upon her showing no mercy to the little daughter Naseeba. Locking the door he beat poor Tehmina mercilessly until ‘He tore my sari to shreds. I did not need to scream. My baby’s screams made up for mine’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 242). Her own screams were drowned by the baby’s cries.

---

¹. The name given by ancient Greek historians to the last King of Assyria died (626 B.C.) portrayed as being notorious for his wealth and sensuality. (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, Oxford N.Y. 1995 (P. 1284) The name is applied to any luxurious, extravagant, self-willed tyrant. (Brewar’s Dictionary of Phrase & Fable, London, Cassell 1953, (P. 804)
Next morning she pretended to her mother as if nothing had happened. “I was learning to hide my feelings – and my bruises from the world.” (My Feudal Lord, P. 242)

Tehmina in her sweep also takes Mr. Bhutto. She proves that the P.M. of Pakistan showed that he had clay feet. Or rather he could not hide his cloven hooves.

In the Chapter 7, entitled as Et Tu Brutus she writes about Bhutto’s love-affair with ‘Husna Shaikh, a beautiful divorcee’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 254)

His affair with ‘Husna began when he was a minister in Ayub’s cabinet. However Bhutto’s involvement with Husna came to fore after his fall. Mustafa played the role of a go-between. Husna severed the relationship after ‘Mr Bhutto had an argument with her’.

‘When Bhutto finally became President, he sent for Husna immediately... Husna began to put pressure on Bhutto to legalize their relationship’. On the Holy Quran Bhutto wrote that ‘he had accepted her as his wife in the eyes of God. Husna agreed. The deed was done. Husna kept the Koran’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 255)

Nusrat Bhutto’s wife was in the know of the illicit relations. So much so that ‘At one stage she decided to leave Mr. Bhutto and to go back to her native Iran’. Mustafa went as Bhutto’s emissary to make reconciliation between them. His good counsel prevailed. ‘Nusrat came back but her relations with her husband were always estranged’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 255)

Husna’s house in Clifton became favourite haunt of favour seekers’... (My Feudal Lord, P. 255)

When he was in political trouble he publicly denied having any
relation with Husna. Husna for the sake of Bhutto’s prestige kept mum. In the words of Tehmina ‘To the eternal credit of Husna she did hold her silence’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 256)

It speaks volumes when Tehmina narrates about Mustafa ‘He felt more at ease with a lower class of women where sex could be bought than sought’. (My Feudal Lord, P. 256)

The Samarabad incident in which two Kharral girls were kidnapped developed in a scandal against Mustafa Khar.

...‘The newspapers made Mustafa out to be a sex fiend’. He was no more Sher-e-Punjab. ‘He was now a ‘goonda’ and ‘badmash’ who must have destroyed countless homes by abducting daughters for his carnal desire. Wives and daughters of Punjab were told to fear the time that Mustafa Khar would return.’ (My Feudal Lord, P. 271)

Thus all our autobiographers had faced social conflict or social problems. Each social crisis ended up in the further strengthening of their character as the fire makes the gold still glittering.