Chapter-IV

Novels, Short Stories & Non-Fiction
Novels, Short Stories and Non-fiction

The feminist upsurge of Kamala Das falls also within the ambit of her novels and short stories. Though she has, to her credit, several volumes of short stories and novels in Malayalam, she writes a few of them in English. Most of those who have read all her works must agree that she is at her best in her Malayalam short stories.

Kamala Das had found by experience that her genius was not productive in the writing of novels. Her one contribution to this genre, *The Alphabet of Lust*, has made her feel that the novel was not her choice. She could not invent or construct a good plot. Nor was she a success in painting full-length portraits required in a novel. For this reason, she desists her hand a second time from the writing of the novel. In the short stories, on the other hand, no detailed plot or elaborate character delineation is
required. So she takes up this as her forte and is markedly good in the
depiction of characters and incidents.

Most of her portraits are of members of her Nalapat family, from her
great grandmother and her famous great-uncle down to the cooks and maid-
servants, and a host of other people, real and imaginary, pass before us like
living persons. We see such well-drawn characters in many of her short
stories.

In *Alphabet of Lust*¹, the life story of Manasi, the frustrated wife of a
government official, Amol Mitra, who looked old enough to be her father,
is a long and persevering quest for identity, which, witnessing various ups
and downs of life, finds its culmination in her achieving the highest and the
most-coveted political office of the country – Prime Ministership. This
quest overtakes her to an arena of assessing the limits or the freedom that a
woman can carry out; which again, is one of the tenets of feminism.

The quest of the lady protagonist for success in life through the
ministerial post defies her to recognize barriers, inhibitions, moral codes,
and social code. Manasi becomes a poetess out of her sheer despondency in
life: "her poetry had burst out of the mind of her utter hopelessness like a

red lotus. Her loveless, emotionally-starved, and maladjusted married life is a great disappointment to her. The fact is shown by her words: "We are not suited to each other. He is busy with his files all the time. I like people, conversation, some show of affection." Sex with her husband was an act of self-mortification and, instead of showing his appreciation or gratitude for her, she, like every woman, wanted him to adore and admire her physical beauty. "She wanted him to praise the contours of her full breasts and the smooth silk of her thighs. She wanted him to smother her with surprise-gifts which had no utility value". And, this is the sensibility that runs deep in a woman and the same is wanted to be reciprocated, improved, or modified in this society of patriarchy.

The husband, on the other hand, is not conscious of the yearnings that the wife possesses, and so, he brings for her tins of ovaltine or a bottle of pickles picking them up at some reduction sale and offering them to her heraldically as though they were coveted trophies.

Kamala Das felt very unhappy and was of the view that women's sentiment could not be expressed openly and also it could not be manifested fully; besides, according to her, women saw themselves as men saw them. The real nature of women remained dormant. They were not

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1 ibid., p. 10.
2 ibid. 10.
even aware of their oppressions. They were victimized and were made to reconcile to this kind of situations because of their economic dependence on men. This shows control on women through force; the close link between women's oppression and the material conditions.

But even though the "victims" did not revolt against this kind of loopholes instituted by patriarchy, Kamala Das tries to counter oppression that despises women as women. She craves for a better environ where there will be no oppression and exploitation or the deprivation of women's rights and equality with men.

The freedom a woman ought to enjoy is further shown in her *The Alphabet of Lust*. Manasi's despair in her married life acts as a jet to her search for identity which gets a further promising stimulus and direction through her turning to Vijay, one of her old admirers, a womanizer, a young and depraved politician, now a minister, and a rising star in politics. She regretfully feels that theirs would have been an ideal pair. "We would have made an excellent pair. Poetess and Politician"⁴. Vijay, who, too, is greatly charmed by her, and wants to possess and marry her, is instrumental in procuring several advantages for her. The highest literary award she receives in Delhi for her latest book of poems, according to her belief, is solely the result of Vijay's undaunted efforts. Her pleasure trip to Simla in

⁴ *Alphabet of Lust*, p. 15.
his lustful, luscious, and luxurious company for a promised pair of diamond rings, serves to bring closer to him. In the mean time, the uninhibited sexual offers and favours purported by Manasi to those whom she meets is but one part of her quest for identity. It helps her in establishing close contacts with the Prime Minister, a woman-hunter, and a widower for twelve years, and wins her the greatly-cherished ministerial berth. And her sexual surrenders to those who wield great power and influence cause no remorse of conscience in her, so long as they continue to help her in climbing socially and politically. Her such nature is depicted in *The Alphabet of Lust* in the following lines:

*Vijay, I am willing to do whatever the P.M. wants me to do. It is not as if I am a chaste woman now. A pativrata. You saw to it that I became a mere tart. I rented out my body for a pair of diamond earrings. And hereafter for power I shall rent it out to the most influential tenant I can hope to get.*

[pp. 40-41]

The above lines clearly manifest on how Manasi is ever ready to sell her physique so long as she climbs the higher hierarchy of social order.

Her becoming a mistress of the Prime Minister, makes her obtain several rewards. She starts commanding a very great power and authority in the Government, and her less important portfolio of Information and
Broadcasting is being replaced by the more important and powerful Portfolio of Home Affairs. Her political rise is never on the wane. The paralytic stroke suffered by the present Prime Minister, gives her the chance to hold the highest political office of the country – the Prime Ministership. So this is her assertion of individuality, though it causes her rift with her husband, it brings her to the highest pinnacle of success and glory.

The novel is flanked by other characters like Vijay Raje, Cyrus and Suparna. The quest for power is also readily discernible in these characters too. Vijay, for example, tries to make a niche for himself in the Government, and, for this, no manipulation, no endeavour, is too intriguing and immoral for him. His obsession for becoming the greatest politician with power and influence subordinates all his other interests, including his interest in Manasi. He even sends Manasi to the Prime Minister's bed with a purpose as, "through her, he, Vijay Raje, was going to become the most powerful minister in the cabinet".\(^5\) The cooperation that he extends, through fair or foul means, to the Government to stifle and suppress all opposition is a part of his design to win appreciations as the most powerful politician. His involvement in the throwing of a bomb at Sadasivarao, his chief political rival, in one of his meetings at the C.J. Hall, the injury

\(^5\) *Alphabet of Lust*, p. 60.
suffered by him through a stone hurled at him, and his death following the administration of a poisonous injection to him, is quite explicit.

Vijay Raje's shifting of attentions from Manasi to her lovely and alluring nineteen-year old daughter, Supama, and his desire to marry her not only show his fondness of having his own preferences in personal matters but also show how women in our society are given a puppetry treatment as satisfying objects for men.

Women, in most occasions, fall as victims to gratify the carnal desires of men in these patriarchal set-ups. Manasi, going to the Prime Minister's bed and offering her physical body to him is not only conducive to get the highest political office but also serves as a vent for obtaining the sexual consummation of the man.

Kamala Das is so obsessed to fight the suppression of women in general. Hence, she has to come back time and again to the theme of sexual oppression. We have also observed how the foregone lines show the way male psyche treats woman as well as a willing submission on the part of woman to male arrogance. She feels restless that women go through life with an attitude of resignation and dormancy. And this practice, according to her, must be broken and a new status for women must be created at an equilibrium stage with male-folks.
Kamala Das also wrote, "A Doll for the Child Prostitute". This story is the most important and interesting one. It covers 49 pages altogether and according to K. Radha, it has the stuff of a short novel rather than a long short story. In this connection, she remarks:

"A Doll for the Child Prostitute" contains satire, irony, social criticism and even a moral. It could well have been elaborated into a novel of normal length.

Since it has all the characteristics of a novel, it can be treated as a novelette.

The story is set at a Bombay brothel. It is an excellent documentary on how a brothel in any city is run. All the problems faced by the Head of the house are dealt with – the competition with other houses in the neighbourhood, the sudden interference by the police, the necessity to keep the inmates well-fed, clean and free from infection, accidental pregnancy of the inmates and the difficulty of ending it, and the need to keep the police in good humour.

This novelette is much more than a documentary. It is a good story supported by a number of interesting and well drawn characters. First, and the most important of all, we have the woman who keeps the brothel.

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* All the subsequent page references are to this edition.
Lachmi Bai, affectionately called Ayee by the inmates. She is proud of the girls and looks after them with a sense of maternal treatment. She could legitimately claim that the girls are well-fed and clean, that they are not "filthy, five rupeewalis" like those of her rival Koushalya's in the same street. She feeds them with no dearth of vitamins. The fact is shown by the following lines from the story:

*Breakfast was served at six every morning, a heavy meal of parathas dripping with vanaspati and an egg curry. There was a glass of milk to top the meal. After partaking of this meal the girls normally curled up on their mats and fell asleep until it was time again for the next meal which was at two. It was only after five that they stirred themselves to attend to their toilets. The bath was elaborate and afterwards their hair was decked with strings of flowers, and, rouge was rubbed into the skin of their cheeks to make them look healthy.*

[p.85]

We see from the above that Ayee Lachmi Bai takes every precaution to make her girls look healthy and attractive. She also knows that her business of the world of prostitution can only be progressed this way. She, therefore, takes the girls to a doctor every week to ensure that they are not sources of infection. She loves them in her own way and they in turn look upon her as a kind guardian who possesses motherly care.
Of the inmates, the best looking and the most educated is Mira who keeps a close attachment with a young college student. He visits her daily and spends hours with her, teaching her politics, and the Gita Govinda, etc. Because of the love offered to her by the college student, Mira wants to reciprocate her love for him. She no longer wants to entertain her visitors any more; she wants to free herself from the chains of the world of prostitution and so, she ultimately asserts her feminine protest against male chauvinism by eloping with the college student.

Although they elope, their love and romance are knocked out of them in the police station. She is brought back to the brothel, but this time, she loses her room which was the best in the house to the dark Saraswati after her escapade.

We have learnt from the story how much the two lovers were obsessed. There was always an air of sadness in their countenance whenever their discourse was over. They cried helplessly after every rendezvous. Their poor condition is reflected in the words which the weeping Mira tells her Ayee:

_He said that he had to sell his pen to visit me. He has no income of his own. He comes here saving his lunch-allowance and his bus fare. He loves me..._

[p. 79]
Women in our society are forcibly pushed to undergo flesh-trade even if they don't want to. They are enduced to perform the tasks which they don't really want but they are forced to do the works for survival and for filling up their own bellies.

Mira is coerced by cruel fate from her very childhood to grow up in the atmosphere and the tradition of the world of prostitution. She has to compromise and adapt to the kind of environs she has been thrust upon despite the discontentment she may have in her heart. She feels that she is in the wrong placement. To assert her quest for freedom of existence, she vehemently tries to undo herself from the fetters of the brothel-house resulting in her elopement with the college boy.

In the story we also find the two child-prostitutes Sita and Rukmani, who have not even attained puberty, are consciously or unconsciously, made to profess the abominable trade of prostitution. Their world presents a series of snapshots depicting the horried life of the unfortunate inmates of a house of disrepute, a sickening, dehumanizing world of dirt and disease, sloth and scandal, and the pain and the penury inflicted to these inmates.

The helpless orphans, Sita and Rukmani, are too young to realize the full implication of the profession they are practising. Sita was thrown into the profession after all her family members died because of cholera four
years ago. And Rukmani was kept there by her own mother, Anasuya out of wretchedness and starving condition at home, and also, most inevitably, because of the unbecoming behaviour of her step-father. The remark she gives on the day Rukmani was kept in the brothel of Lachmi Bai (Ayee) runs as follows:

_I would not have taken any money from you, Ayee, but we are practically starving at home. The baby is given nothing but tea and may be a banana at noon._

[p. 68]

Out of sheer innocence the two children land up in this kind of dehumanizing and sickening trade of disrepute. Feminists thus desire to fight for such kind of oppression and exploitation against the 'fair-sex' in a system of patriarchal dominance. They want women to stand up and fight against this injustice. They call on women to resist marginalization and passivisation.

The two characters portrayed by Kamala Das as Sita and Rukmani in "A Doll for the Child Prostitute" shows us how innocent children and women are oppressed in a system of male hegemony. These two helpless orphans, particularly Rukmani, is too young to decipher the significance of the job she is doing. Let us unfold the discourse they exchange to each other when she joins the brothel for the first time.
I cannot sleep in the day", said Rukmani. Sita laughed loudly and held on to her stomach as though it was about to burst. "You are so innocent. Do you think we can sleep at night in this house? We shall all be so busy entertaining the visitors". "Visitors at night?" asked Rukmani "who will come at night?" Sita could not control her laughter. "Oho ho", she laughed . . . .

Rukmani kept her satchel of books on the mat meant for her and Sita. "Men come to do things here", said Sita. "What things?" asked Rukmani. She was thinking of her step-father and the pain she had experienced.

[p. 70]

The above lines inflame the readers with pathos and a sense of discontentment. The scenic situation brings forth a curiosity and an impulse to immediately rectify the wrongs taking place in our society. It provokes our thought to stand up and voice against the sexual harassment of the young females done especially with masochistic tendencies. It drives us forward with a zeal to correct such mistakes and punish the wrong persons.

The characters delineated in these short stories appear real and seem to be living persons of flesh and blood. These characters, therefore, win the pity and the sympathy of the readers and activate in them a strong bond of audacity with an inclination to abolish the flaws and errors of the phallic power.
The works of Kamala Das also supply the raw material to be pragmatic and also to ruminate what is antithetical to Roland Barthes' statement, "The text dies with the author". It is to see to it that there is progression evolving out of the reading of her text. The text should, with the spirit of the author, improve the suffering lot of the women-folks. It must be an avenue to interpret the text focusing on their grievances, subjugations, suppressions and exploitations, etc. Hence, it demands, on the part of the scriptor, to tactfully explain such oppressions and find a way to curb the already deplorable conditions of women sect.

The thesis I take up is aimed as a rendezvous to highlight all the oppressions done to women in general and to explore their concealed emotions as seen on the portraits of Mrs. Das. Rukmani, for instance, represents the most pathetic figure in the brothel as she is too young to know anything about the happening in the house. Then there is the sweet and fragile Sita who becomes pregnant and meets her own death due to a crude operation of abortion. And yet, the Police Inspector manages to certify that the poor girl's death was a burst appendix.

The manner in which Kamala Das tells her stories comes like a 'combing operation'. Her narratives are powerful enough to provide suspense and scintillation. In the meantime, when we 'deconstruct' the
specific characters in the persons of Sita and Rukmani, it shifts to any child, daughter, niece or young girl who could have similarly been forced into the trade of child prostitution against her wish. Such practices should be removed from our society. The pangs and the agonies endured by these girls must be given a timely intervention. The authorities concerned must not stay aloof or shy away from such occurrences.

Short fictions by Indian women continue to explore the different ways in which women try to survive and the way they cope themselves with the society, their responses and expectations evolving out of marriage call for careful consideration. In the attempt to establish their identity, they have launched various protests and rebellions within the boundary of marriage. Marriage, again, is an indispensable obligation to the middle-class Indian women. So they cannot abstain from it. The days they spend in agony, the suffering they receive, the hardships, which, in few cases are incongruous, are found culminated within the institution of marriage. Myriads of feminine protests in a pluralistic society like India, are found in plenty and varied over the years in the hands of writers of different temperaments and view-points.
Kamala Das' "A Little Kitten" is a short story. It explains how sexual attraction diminishes in a couple after marriage. The deliberate omission of names for the husband and wife makes this story a generalized relationship for all marriages. In the beginning of the story, married life is presented like a perpetual honeymoon with its picturesque scene of a middle class character. However, with the passage of time, the charms of marriage begins to fade, and the wife starts longing for a pet. See how the author avers of the husband and the wife in the following remark:

...at Dadar, she told her husband that she felt miserable and lonely from eight in the morning to six in the evening while he worked in the insurance firm at the heart of the city. If you could get me a pet, she murmured, nestling closer to his chest, a little kitten, even a little kitten would be such a comfort....

The deterioration of the value of marriage is palpable. Here the wife becomes so lonely that even a pet like a kitten would have been such a good companion in the absence of her husband. But he does not give much attention to her wish. He simply thinks, "what a sweet and innocent creature he had married" (38). The term "creature" and not "woman" should be marked and taken into consideration. The reason is that many a woman are treated below the level of human beings. They are likened to the objects

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1 Kamala Das, "A Little Kitten", in Padminati, the Harlot and Other Stories (New Delhi: Sterling Paperbacks, 1992).
for satisfying the sexual urge of men. The husband simply amuses himself by playing with her instead of endorsing her the slightest idea on finding a kitten for her. He plays with her “until she rolled over on their double bed and screamed out for mercy. You are killing me, please stop, PLEASE STOP.” (38). The truth of her cry does not reach him; however, her boredom, her loneliness, and her discontentment at being treated like a toy, are killing her.

The wife is just a plaything for the husband, so he tires of her and the quarrels, and the lack of communication between them separate them apart. The wife becomes increasingly frustrated and disoriented. She no longer takes bath in the evenings. The freshness has gone out of her, and no longer hangs strands of jasmine on her plait. These flowers are an image of the lost happiness and of unfulfilled hopes. The later details also add to the sense of the disintegration of the marriage. For instance, the “new crease on her brow which sliced the red bindi into two halves”, (39) his coming home ‘dead drunk’ one evening, her tearing of her sari ‘into shreds’ – again the smoke from the chimney of the neighbouring mill that darkens her skin are evidences of a life sans happiness and sans peace.

Besides, the husband no longer takes any interest in sex games with his wife. So he gives his secretary expensive gifts and also takes her out to
private places like the restaurants "where they could sit half-concealed behind potted cacti" (40). The wife with a tinge of the disillusioned relationship of the marriage, wishes to go back to her parents, but he dissuades her from going there as he is scary of what her parents would say. This deteriorated bond between the husband and the wife is seen by other characters in the story as is shown in the following lines:

> Even the old Maharastrian woman who used to wash the vessels for her in the morning, began to wonder what had gone wrong. She had lost her bridal freshness.10

Later in the story, we find that the wife comes back to life. She dresses up again, smiles at him, look pink and healthy with a red scratch above her breasts; and this scratch is taken to be the handiwork evolving out of her finding a kitten for herself to play with, a new interests in life. She does not answer when the husband asks if she has found a kitten, but she simply smiles and looks up at the "dusky sky" (40) with all its association of freedom and mystery, though to him they are only "some clouds, some smoke". (40) The husband's 'infidelity' on sexual matters, too is a pleasure and a game to him.

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This infidelity is experienced amongst many of our couples today. So the loneliness which the wife experiences is also the loneliness which every woman faces in this society of male dominance.

The deterioration of the relationship of the couples after marriage, the disenchantment wrought by this institution of nuptiality in terms of mutual indifference, distrust, unwariness, negligence, etc. are on the rise. The worsening relations of husbands and wives, the isolation and the alienation associating especially with 'fair sex' must be given a proper consideration and assimilative analysis.

Women are often marginalized. They are invariably found in many of the circumstances and situations which are exploitative as well as suppressive. They, therefore, need a helping hand to shift the position they are occupying, and must be given better avenues to combat subjugation or suppression whereby they, too, could enjoy the privileges of equality and liberty. The de facto erroneous position of these so-called 'others' needs a change so as to bring them at par with male chauvinism.

Kamala Das' My Story\textsuperscript{11} has won her a colossal cognizance as a poet and a writer. It will not be an exaggeration to say that she is the most controversial Indian poet writing in English because of the publication of

\textsuperscript{11} Kamala Das, My Story (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1976)
\textsuperscript{*} All the subsequent page references are to this edition.
this autobiography. The very qualities of forthrightness and expressiveness found in the story demand laudability and appreciation. But few of our genuine readers saw the work as a woman's tale of woe, or paid attention to its theme of loneliness or discontentment. Here, we can see how by the very act of defining female space, she was recognized as a threat to the then existing adherents of patriarchal practices. As a result, many critics including her own relatives had to file suit for her unprecedented writing. Severe critical dissent and adverse publicity were hurled against her as a consequence of which she had to withdraw herself. Thus, the writer who had attempted to define female space becomes different and unsure of her intrinsic worth. She feels mandatory to provide an explanation for her work. In her preface to *My Story*, she explains the reasons for her writing thus:

*The doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of a sudden death, and, besides, there were all the hospital bills to be taken care of.*

Despite the public outcry, social disparagement and the insecurity she might have felt, this text serves as the 'central-text' for all the critics in matters of such genres as psychology, sociology and psychoanalysis with regard to women. It can also be taken as the basis for the ramification of
approaches including Marxist and other diverse post-structuralist theorists besides defining masculinity and femininity.

With the launching of this book, many changes are seen from the perspective of feminist ideologies in Indian writings in English. The emphasis on 'female-ego' gets broadened, women in the society become popular and more women writing begins to appear in public. Today, women in India can freely mention the term 'sex' without any inhibition. It is no longer a taboo or a word to impinge feminine dignity, nor can it degrade womanly image. Contrastingly, by mentioning this term, a woman can openly pursue her rights as an individual and as an equal being to live with dignity. She can freely stand up and fight against the unjust codes of phallocentric systems. This free exercise of expressions and open confessions might have not been possible had there been no personality as Kamala Das. She has outrightly carved out a new route for all feminist writers to drive home feminist sensibilities. She did this at the cost of discarding traditional canons and the ethos of an Indian womanhood. However, she does not in the least regret for what she has done as she emphatically describes in the preface of her autobiography given below:

This book has cost me many things that I held dear, but I do not for the moment regret having written it. I have written several books in my lifetime, but none of them
provided the pleasure the writing of My Story has given me. [Preface]

Kamala Das could decipher that delving deep into her own self would create a uniqueness in the literary scene. For this reason, she takes the risk in materializing her own story in the book form. Only by writing an expression she knew that the woman writer would succeed in breaking down existing social power structures and create a place for herself in the world of masculine hierarchies. The woman writer, as she understands, could thereby alter her existing marginalized position and accept her rightful role as a significant part of the society. By writing the self, the woman writer could challenge the accepted notions of femininity and redraft general opinion on the feminine mystique and so she took up the art of writing about herself.

The very title - My Story - impresses us and there is an indication of amorous scintillation that comes with a big bang. It is shown by the scene of the wedding night:

*The rape was unsuccessful but he comforted me when I expressed my fear that I was perhaps not equipped for sexual congress. . . . Again and again throughout that unhappy night he hurt me and all the while the Kathakali drums throbbed duly against our window and the singers sang of Damayanti's plight in the jungle.*

[p. 93]
The tone of her expression arouses sexuality and sex-intrigues. Excitement is one of the irresistible characteristic traits in her narratives. As we have seen in the above lines, she demonstrates her own story with a tinge of seduction. Her exposition of narration can be likened to Ulyssean voyage. Just as Ulysses meets many women such as Circe and other enchantresses on his return journey from the Trojan War, Kamala Das also encounters a number of men other than her husband and develops extra marital affairs with them in the later stage of her married life.

Kamala Das got married to a person who was interested only in her body, and used it for his gratification of carnal desire; but his lust seemed to be insatiable. During the engagement period, while he was posted in Bombay she narrates her experience as: "whenever he found me alone in the room, he began to plead with me to bare my breasts and if I did not, he turned brutal and crude. His hands bruised my body and left blue and red marks on the skin". (87) He was indeed, well-versed in the art of sex games that he narrated to her the sexual exploits he had shared with some of the maidservants in his house in Malabar. Kamala Das had also hoped that marriage would give her altogether, a different picture: "I had expected him to take me in his arm and stroke my face, my hair, my hands and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be, and my mother. I wanted conversation, companion and warmth. Sex
was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one
sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life". (87) The nuptial tie
mentioned by her father as finding a "mate" also saddened and depressed
her. The word "mate" with its earthly connotations made her uneasy and
yet, she could not express her discontentment openly and her such
predicament is voiced in the following words:

"I would not tell my father that I had hoped for a more
tranquil relationship with a hand on my hair and a voice
in my ear, telling me that everything was going to be all
right for me. I had no need at all for the rough hands
riding up my skirts or tearing up my brassiere".

[p. 87]

The above lines reflect the utter helplessness of Mrs. Das. She had
hoped that marriage could be a tranquil relationship; a unison of two hearts
in love and tenderness, a mutual understanding between the wife and the
husband, etc. But contrary to her aspirations, it turned out to be a reality of
illuminated taste in which she received little or no attention from her
husband. As early as 1949, Simone de Beauvoir wrote in The Second Sex:

Women do not set themselves up as subject and hence
have erected to virile myth in which their projects are
reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own:
they still dream through the dreams of men.12

What Simone de Beauvoir remarked in 1949 seems still relevant to our womenfolk today. Seemingly, what a man cannot do must also not be done by a woman. These women seem to have been barred from expressing what they like or feel. Feminists, therefore, are trying hard to draw up a road-map for themselves. They try to define themselves and create a world of their own; a world in which their mouths are not gagged to express their hidden emotions but can freely raise their voice to the maximum decibel height.

Their strategy to the realization of this dream is given to writing. Through writing, they believe, could a woman writer succeed in breaking down the existing social power structures and create a place for herself in the world of masculine hegemony. By writing herself, Kamala Das also believes that she could challenge the accepted notions of the female despondency and find a new footpath to translate or interprete her dreams. Rosalind Brackenbury, a staunch feminist, holds the following view:

Nobody writes in a vacuum, away from the political and social structures in which we live. We breathe the air of today’s thought, we digest it in everything we read and consider; also, we create it. This is largely the role of women today: to create, present and consider a new world.\textsuperscript{13}

Kamala Das also tries her level best to create a new horizon wherein she can freely give vent to her hidden emotions, and freely express them. The result is the publication of this most controversial autobiography "My Story".

When Kamala Das felt betrayed, lonely and disappointed at her husband's place; and when she found that her love was "like alms looking for a begging bowl which only sought for a receptacle", (124) an Italian, Carlo, came into her life. She fell in love with him who is an extremely handsome young man, at Khar gymkhana, where she had gone in the evening to play tennis. "The evening sun lit up his grey eyes. The gloss of his skin and the beauty of his smile made me feel all of a sudden so awestruck, so humble . . . ." [p. 119]

Love transformed her life and she described that her . . . "days were filled with incredible sweetness. On the porch the Rangoon creepers bloomed, the tender pinks looking white in the evening's shadows. I hung a brass lamp in the porch and lit it every evening".[p.120]

"One evening when I was seated on the top step of the porch, the grey-eyed friend came to sit at my feet. His lips had a tremor which delighted me. I hope you are not falling in love with me, I said, smiling down at him. He hid his face in the folds of my sari. Outside my sons were
playing with the neighbour's children. Inside our drawing room my husband was working on his files." [p.120]

Her mention of the lips of the lover boy with tremor is enough a significance that she has some sex appeal of him. This amorous perception is also associated by a mark of daringness and bravery because the rendezvous she mentions in the story takes place adjacent to her husband which is evidenced by the line - "Inside our drawing room my husband was working on his file".

She goes on to demonstrate yet another moving experience to add to her courage and valour:

> During that summer while the Gulmohurs burnt the edges of the sky, he dressed my hair with white flowers plucking them from beneath my window. What did he want from me? Once or twice standing near him with his arms around my shoulders I whispered I am yours, do with me as you will, make love to me... but he said, no, in my eyes you are a goddess, I shall not dishonour your body.

[p. 121]

From the above we come to observe that Kamala Das' revelation on man-woman relationship is to the maximum level because the consummation of love completes the whole affairs of a man and a woman who are in love. Her offer of her body to her lover 'to make love' is an
expression which is not decorous to a modest Nair woman. But she freely expresses this fact or whatever she has in her mind. Her expression finds its culmination in terms of her anecdotes, *tale, story, narrative, yarn, sketches*, etc.

In a way, she deconstructs the patriarchal power structures by assassinating or violating the canons framed by the pro-misogynic society. Kamala Das wants to delineate all the events and situations that she comes across; and she shows them to the readers without any reticence. She, as a feminist, confronts the inconvenient restrictions which envelop the 'fair sex' and draws a new term of reference, an entirely different structural framework for woman writing. Like all feminists call for a new language, Kamala Das also joins the slogan that would assist in expressing female experiences. Elaine Showalter explains the programme thus:

*The programme of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than adapt male models and stories.*

The works of Kamala Das – both poetry and prose – are startlingly unconventional in the Indian context. Yet, she persistently pursued her

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writing without ever being bothered whether her husband or community liked it or approved of it. Truly, it was her writing which provided her with an outlet for her hidden discontentment, hurts, humiliations and grief.

Love was what she had longed for, and Carlo was not the only one. She was overflowing with love and she made an offering of it to others as well. She must have experienced all phases of love: platonic, sensuous, serene, cynical, conjugal, illicit, picturesque and lusty like that of John Donne because she had even tried 'adultery' for sometime.

She also got infatuated with a literary-minded friend with whom she enjoyed conversing on literary subjects. She gave him gilded volumes of Lawrence Hope. Her relationship with Carlo also continued. She visited him at his hostel. Her longing for love was incessant like an ever flowing spring. She would not give up her search for a true and ideal lover. She says, "I loved as men love their women, but I yearned for change, a new life. I was looking for an ideal lover. I was looking for the one who went to Mathura and forgot to return to his Radha. Perhaps I was seeking the cruelty that lies in the depths of a man's heart. Otherwise why did not I get my peace in the arms of my husband?" (180)

Kamala Das' search for her ideal lover was a failure because it cannot be found in the human form. No matter how hard she tried, she
could not achieve what she had been looking for. She began to realize this reality with the onset of middle age, bringing with it a gross skin and a haggard face. She began to doubt whether she could "lure a charming male into a complicated satisfying love affair with the right words, the right glances, the right gestures?" Whether her time as a charmer was finished and gone? "Then with the force of a typhoon", she says, "he conquered me, the last of my lovers, the most notorious of all, the king of all kings, the bison among animals, the handsome dark one with a tattoo between his eyes". [pp.187-188]

She further described this man who had seduced and titillated her in the following words:

_He was coming out of a cloth shop at Churchgate and I was walking in. His face was familiar to me. I stared at him in fascination. There were several stories circulating about his innumerable love affairs and his sexual prowess. In my eyes he was a magnificent animal._

[p. 188]

Kamala Das who had for long craved for a tender love-relationship finally got fascinated by this man, who was known for his fabulous lusts. Having met him at the airport for a second time, she says,
He drew me to him as a serpent draws its dazed victim. I was his slave. That night I tossed about in my bed thinking of his dark limbs and of his eyes glazed with desire. Very soon we met and I fell into his arms.

Whatever Kamala Das writes, is tilted on the realm of carnal hungers. Her depiction of the relationship of man and woman is unique although the canvass that she employs is very much within the discipline of Indian ethos and flavour. She explores her body as well as the biological sensations in sexual terms. By delving deep into her own self she becomes the mouthpiece for every Indian woman in terms of the tales of discontentment, victimization, agony, exploitation, disgrace and abuse.

Her search for ideal love coerced her to develop extramarital affairs and a heterogeneous mixture of lovers outside the wedlock. She did this at the cost of defying her family background, culture, tradition, the modesty and the chastity of a Nair woman which again is an important feminist principle.

Love, according to Kamala Das, is not a mere physical exercise; but should be accompanied by the fulfilment of the spirit. For this reason she fell in love with many lovers hoping to achieve an ideal love. But her search came to be a failure because real love or true love cannot be achieved in the physical form. Realizing fully on the impossibility of
finding real love in the human form, she reconciles it with Radha-Krishna myth or the Mira-Krishna relationship; and finally yearns for Lord Krishna as her icon.

From the foregone analysis, we come to know that Kamala Das is very much a confessional poet. Her open confession has made her personality manifest in its stark nakedness. My Story, therefore, gives a perspective of her whole individuality including her sex life, feminine longings and forthrightness.

The oodles of love-experience she portrays associated with its peculiarity and incongruity might, according to some critics, be understood with reference to the sociological dimension offered by her Nair lineage. Sunanda P. Chavan in this regard, puts it in the following lines:

The Nair society has the matrilineal, matrilocal organization and did not hinder the plurality of husbands to a Nair woman. Of course, it treated marital relations with increasingly rigidity from the end of the 19th century.¹⁵

Whatever the case may be, Kamala Das has carved out a new route with an unprecedented zeal through her writing especially for the women-writers of India so as to give vent to their depreciated values and to redress

their feminine grievances. This autobiography with which she puts myriads of her thoughts and feelings has given an impetus as an example for every woman to protest and rebel against the unjust forces of patriarchy.

In the course of my research investigation, I have found her to be sensitive, bold and transparent in articulating her temperament or personal anguish. Her vital effort to expose man-woman relationship in its full complexity has given a new horizon enough to inflame the outlook of the feminist writers.

The report I have furnished here will also serve as a very useful source of information in furthering investigation and enquiry into Kamala Das' oeuvre for the young scholars; and it would not be an exaggerated statement that she has modernized the Indian psyche on women writing.