

Vol 2 Issue 3 Sept 2014

ISSN No: 2321-5488

*International Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

Research Directions

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Welcome to Research Direction
ISSN No.2321-5488

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EXPOSITION OF MALE DOMINATION IN KAMALA DAS'S *MY STORY*

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Abstract:

Kamla Das was born on 31st March 1934 in Punnayurkulam, the then Malabar district belonging to the Madras Presidency. Her pen name was Madhavikkutty. Her father was V.M.Nair, who was former editor of Mathrubhumi, a periodical and later on he became a senior officer of Walford Transport Company in the erstwhile Calcutta. Kamla's mother was Balamani Amma, who had reasonable poetic talents. At the age of 15 Kamla was married to K. Madhav Das, an officer, Reserve Bank of India in Bombay. This marriage gave rise to three sons- Madhav Das Nalpat, Chinnen Das and Jayasurya Das.

KEY WORDS:

Male Domination , Kamala Das's *My Story* , autobiography , Literature.

INTRODUCTION:

Kamla was quite intimate with only two persons, the first was her brother and the second was her grandmother. She was emotionally tied with the Nalpat House in Punnayurkulam. Her marriage with K. Madhav Das was not much fruitful; therefore, she had to find 'love' outside the marital relation. The death of her grandmother and the decline of the Nalpat House were discouraging developments in her life. The only source of relief for her was writing, which did create a therapeutic impact on her life. She profusely contributed her stories and poems to the periodicals, sometimes under the fake name 'K. Das'. A lot of sensational reactions were given to her when she came out with her serially published autobiography titled "Ente Katha" in Malayalanadu in 1973. In the year 1988 she translated her autobiography into English under the title "My Story". The book covers a period of 40 years in the life of its author. Kamla Das published different collections of poems. She has also written stories which were published in different anthologies. At 65 Kamla, having lost her husband, got married to Sadiq Ali, a Muslim League Member of Parliament. She converted to Islam, which changed her name into Kamla Surayya. She formed a political party named Lok Seva Party in 1984. She contested Parliamentary elections, but in vain. She was felicitated several times for her literary contributions. She received the PEN Prize, the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, the Sahitya Academy Award, the Asian Poetry Prize, the Kent Award, the Vayalar Award, DLitt by University of Calicut and to top it all she was nominated and shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1984. She died on 31st May 2009.

BACKGROUND TO "MY STORY":

Kamla Das was motivated into writing down the autobiography by her circumstances. She was born in a conservative Malayalam family coming from Punnayurkulam, which is now in Kerala. Her father and mother were a mismatched couple, who couldn't bless their children with enough love and care.

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Kamla found a durable relationship in her brother, her grandmother and the Nalpat House. Kamla was not lucky in her husband, who was not able to initiate his young wife into a healthy physical relationship, who maintained illicit relations with his friends and who would be busy up his neck in the work of his employer, i.e. Reserve Bank of India. Kamla got married at a tender age of 15 and gave birth to three sons within a short length of time after the marriage. To make the matters worse, she had to live in different places like Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi with an insufficient income of her husband. There was a time when she felt that she should commit suicide. However, she didn't do that, instead she engrossed herself into writing. Thus, she started to be noticed in the literary circles. Gradually, she rose to fame as a writer with a liberal style of expression. Her writing was an outcome of the way she lived her life, maintaining relations outside her marriage, nevertheless keeping the marital tie intact. She first serialized the episodes of her autobiography in Malayalam under the title "Ente Katha" in 1973. The publication of these episodes generated a lot of controversy. Her parents tried to smother her voice, but she resisted them and staunchly published the autobiography. She, later on, translated the Malayalam book into English. The Malayalam autobiography has 27 chapters, but the English translation is made up of 50. A number of chapters in the English version begin with epigraphs. The book exhibits genre-crossing, as it incorporates different genres. The text is polyphonic, since the narration in it is done at different levels by Kamla Das as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, lover, writer, middle-class woman. The overall tone of the autobiography is confessional. The writer has put forward a number of facts in her life as she underwent them.

EXPOSITION OF MALE DOMINATION:

Kamla Das's entire life might be seen as a combination of an anti-male consciousness and an incessant search for the ideal male companionship. The beginning of her life saw the shadows of her father's dominance and a total surrender of her mother to him. Kamla's childhood was marred by the socio-political scenario in the nation and the familial conservatism at the domestic level. Her father, though a modern man off the home, practised his Gandhi-oriented austerities making his wife wear the Khaadi sari and hardly any jewelry. Kamla's mother was a poet whose poetry couldn't flower, due only to the dominion of her husband. The early life of Kamla had few genial male members, like her brother, who was very affectionate and talented. Kamla was married against her willingness to K. Madhav Das. Their meeting in Kolkata after they were engaged didn't motivate Kamla into thinking positively about her forthcoming marriage. However, she couldn't oppose the decision of her father, who was all set to see her married off. Kamla's relation with her husband got petrified due to her inability to cope with his sexual demands and her ideas about an ideal husband. Madhav Das couldn't initiate his young wife into a physical and emotional relationship which is the consequence of a married life. He extracted the carnal pleasure and Kamla had to surrender herself to the overwhelming passions of her husband. She had to give up her education due to a hurriedly done marriage at the behest of her father. Thus, Kamla's father, V.M.Nair has been depicted in the autobiography to represent the male domination, a frequent phenomenon in the Indian society.

Kamla's husband turned out to be another source of misery for her, as she had to move from one place to another with her husband who worked as an officer in Reserve Bank of India. We see different dimensions to the personality of K. Madhav Das. He was introduced to Kamla as a poet and a lover of literature. However, the very introduction to her fiancé was not worth remembering. Thus, she was totally disgruntled after she saw the real face of the man with whom she tied the knot. Madhav Das was a husband who looked at his better-half as a source of sexual gratification, he was an employee who brought the work & tensions of his work-place home and to make the matters worse he, as the autobiographer discloses, was a gay. Kamla's life was a series of disillusionments. She had cherished the image of Lord Krishna for her companion. She desired for a man who would gradually initiate her into the pleasures of a sustained marital life. This desire soon became an obsession. Kamla wandered from one man to another in search of the *ideal man*. Nevertheless, when she got one, she couldn't really enjoy the pleasure as her life was witnessing the fall.

Another man who dominated the life, indirectly so, of Kamla was her great grand uncle. The ninth chapter titled 'Grand Uncle Narayana Menon' presents a complete picture of this man who was a poet⁴. His mother, Madhavi Amma, was a daughter of a sorcerer of Malabar. Narayana Menon was well-versed in English and Sanskrit literatures. He joined the Theosophical Society of India. He entertained different types of persons to his house. He had a clout in the literary circles in south India. His library had different types of books ranging from literature to books on sex. The grand uncle had his own authority in the Nalpat House. After his death the house witnessed a type of degeneration. This is an indication of the weightage the male members of a family exercise. The Nalpat House witnessed the oppression of women by the male members for years together.

Thus, Kamla had to cope with the continuous domination by different men who were in some way

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or the other related with her. Her life was engaged in a struggle with males and their domination. Nevertheless, she overcame the masculine dominion and proved her mettle. A time had come when she thought about committing suicide, but she gave up the fatal thought & embarked upon the career of a creative writer. She satisfied her father by way keeping stuck to the marital relation, but liberally followed the demands of her emotions and passions. She met with the *ideal man*, she had been longing for years together and satiated her mind and body. Finally, Kamla realized the importance of her being a writer. Her creative faculty turned out to be a remedy for all the ills she had to tackle in her domestic and public life. The story of Kamla Das's life comes to an end with her ideas and insights into the social issues and problems in India.

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