


# Feministic Approach in Kamala Das's My Story

**Robancy Amal**

*Research Scholar, Department of Translation  
Tamil University, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8074-6432>

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## Abstract

*The role of the readers in reading a novel or a poem is to look through the eye of the author and to enjoy the beauty of the literary works. Kamala Das's poetry, novels and short stories have always carried self-transformation and women empowerment asserting her rights freedom and desire to liberate her from the clutches of traditions and cultures which suppress women in the Indian society. This paper tries to analyze the outspoken and controversial autobiography and an unheard cry for freedom of many Indian women and depicts how revealing the inner self of a woman free her from the oppression of Caste, class, race and sex. It has become a cult classic in the 20th century. It attempts to see the feministic approach of the novel.*

**Keywords: Kamala Das, Novel, Autobiography**

## Introduction

Women writers in Indian writing in English have changed the tradition and they have broken the conventions that prevailed. The post-Independence period is a golden era for writers, especially many women writers have emerged and their voices have been registered through their writing. Kamala Das is one among them. They have represented the attitude towards the issues faced by women, which have been unheard of for many years. Writers like Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Mamtha Kalihave spoken about various aspects of the psychological problems women encounter in society.

Kamala Das has contributed to the discussion of much of the problems that represented the whole of the women's community. They have opposed the conventions like male dominance and have exposed themselves through their writings. Life writing is another tool that women writers in India have used to expose them fully.

Kamala Das is one of India's foremost women writers. Born in an aristocratic Hindu Nair family in 1934, Kerala, Kamala Das has the distinction of being one of the best-known Indian women writers of the twentieth century. Not all the women in Indian society dare to speak out their inner self as Kamala Das, a woman of extraordinary valor to speak about it openly that is also coming from a traditional and conservative family.

Their writings have influenced much advancement in the development and empowerment of women. Kamala Das has contributed to the discussion of much of the problems that represented the whole of the women's community. They have opposed the conventions like male dominance and have exposed themselves through their writings. Life writing is another tool that women writers in India have used to expose them fully.

## Feminism

Feminism is a movement and revolution against discrimination of women based on gender, legal, economic and political levels. The word 'Feminism' is derived from the Latin word 'femina' meaning 'woman'. Alice Rossi was the first to use it. This movement was to explore new images of women due to their oppression. This oppression can diminish only if men become more aware of this structure called 'patriarchy'. Feminists have been either activists or theorists. The feminist activities tried for the survival of women against social wrongs whereas theorists had debates on the theory and concept of the term 'Feminism'. This movement started in the western part when the suffragists won the vote in 1918 in Britain and 1920 in America. And in 1960 various activists such as militant feminism, Marxist feminism and radical feminism started working towards discrimination.

## Feministic Approach

Women's autobiographies do not follow the models of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine or Jean Jacques Rousseau, where characters and events exist only to become parts of the landscape of the hero's self-discovery; instead, they include the real presence and recognition of another consciousness.

*My Story* throws light on the aspects of feminism and bold expression of self. *My Story* depicts the truthfulness of the women, and it mirrors society, marital issues, early marriages, male dominance, etc. Through *My Story*, Kamala Das unveils the real face of patriarchal society, religious interference and its outputs.

The autobiography is a yearning for freedom by a woman who has got caught in the traps of roles imposed by traditional patriarchal society. One such feministic reading of the work can be seen in an article titled "Establishing the Identity and Celebrating the Self" in *My Story* by Kamala Das' written by Dr. Rajasekaran and Jasmine Jose who analyse how through her autobiography she establishes her identity by being unconventional.

Miss Sheetal Y Thakore, in her thesis "Select Women's Autobiographies: A Study" discusses how there is a search for true love in Das' autobiography. She also says, "Kamala Das's autobiography *My*

*Story* reveals that a woman is naturally creative and if given a room of her own, she can defend her selfhood and narrate the story of her life boldly". In her thesis, the critique analyses how fearlessly Das has found a voice of her own. In the fifth chapter of the thesis titled "Kamala Das' "My Story" -An Evaluation", the critic gives a psychological perspective of Das' autobiography. Thus she says "Women trapped in boredom and restraint, move out to indulge in sensual pleasures, sex and love is a game, with a changing partner to keep the novelty of life. Her fiction encompasses the psychosexual accomplishments of the female."

The autobiography of Kamala Das's *My story* is a rare piece of feministic work in Indian society. It was unacceptable for women to speak her mind, her thoughts and ideas. That is too about her inner self especially when it comes to sex, lesbianism, and love out of wedlock. It is unimaginable for a woman to speak out her desires to have men other than her husband. But Kamala Das' extraordinary bravery to record all those of her inner feelings and her desires. Having been born in a conservative Hindu Nair family she spoke her heart in her autobiography.

Her father, the powerful V.M Nair, managing director of the Mathrubhumi group, had asked the editor to suspend its publication, but its proud author would be the last to yield pressure tactics. The readers of a serialized autobiography were drawn into a charming and intriguing life of love and longing, of desire and disloyalty, says K. Satchidanandan.

Kamala Das has multi-dimensional thoughts and mentality. As she grows, her desires and her inner desire also change along with her. She belonged to the Nair's family and they consider sex as an awful element. Though they consider it as a sin she openly talks about her sexual experiences especially her terrible experience on her wedding night.

Kamala Das has shared the most personal elements in her autobiography. It proves her uniqueness. She also shared some physically terrible experiences. Her first physical experience begins with the same gender. She admires her and gets a chance to be with her in person. The way she explains their homosexual activities is odd. It can be taken as a token of female maturity. She writes, "It was the first kiss of its kind in my life. Perhaps my mother

may have kissed me while I was an infant but after that none, not even my grandmother had bothered to kiss me. I was unnerved. I could hardly breathe. She kept stroking my hair and kissing my face and my throat all through that night while sleep came to me in snatches and with fever. You are feverish, she said, before dawn, your mouth is hot.”

Kamala Das’ flavored ingredients like openness, intelligence, extreme thoughts and sensibility, emotion, frank in her writings made her different from some other writers. She is unique in her style of writing and more often focuses on a self. In many places, she picturizes her sensibility.

The main thing she embosses in her autobiography is her self-love. It made her fall in love with many people. It even leads her to an extra-marital affair. She is searching for her comfort zone, so she keeps on searching for real love. She has an unconditional love for Lord Krishna. She opens her heart and soul to Lord Krishna and makes herself feel free.

### Conclusion

The orthodox readers of Kerala found *My Story* shockingly forthright and were quick to brand it immoral, denying to their sisters or daughters access to its agonized excitement. Kamala Das was looked upon as a seductress, not someone to make friends with. But Kamala Das was the first Indian writer to explore sexual themes in her autobiography. She is strong enough to throw her feelings through her writings. Through her writings, she has tried to pull out her feminine identity and personal identity

### Author Details

**Robancy Amal**, *Research Scholar, Department of Translation, Tamil University, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India,*  
**Email ID:** *robancyahelenmmm@gmail.com.*

in a male dominant society. It also proves she was dissatisfied both physically and psychologically with mishandled by society.

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