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Short Communication

FACT AND FICTION AS PICTURED BY D.H.LAWRENCE AND KAMALA DAS IN SONS AND LOVERS AND MY STORY: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Kamala Das who looms large over the poetic horizon of today's India, hails from the South, precisely from the Southern Malabar in Kerala. She had primary schooling from a European school in Calcutta, then elementary school at Punnayurkulam, which is her birth place, and then a boarding school run by the Roman Catholic nuns. At the prime age of 15, Kamala Das was married to Mr. Das, an official in the Reserve Bank of India, Bombay where her life became miserable in the company of her nonchalant, lustful husband. "Her husband had no soothing words for her, no time to spare for her and was ever busy sorting out his files and affixing his signature on them. And as a traditional wife, she was expected to discharge her domestic duties well and to look to the needs and comforts of her husband. This eroded her own distinct personality and dwarfed her forever" (Dwivedi 2). As a woman-poet, she speaks of love outside marriage and searches for a kind of man-woman relationship which shall guarantee both love and security to a woman. Writing both in English and Malayalam, she has to her credit publication of such poetical collections as 1. *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), 2. *The Descendants* (1967), 3. *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Tonight, This Savage Rite* (1979), and such works as *My Story* and *Alphabet of Lust* (1976). As a writer of sharp feminine sensibility, Kamala Das gives vent to the hopes, fears and desires of womankind. She is said to have been "the champion of woman's cause in all her writings" (P 114). Not only in her poetry, but also in her essays, stories and novel, Kamala Das comes out as an official spokesman of the Indian counterpart of the woman's "lib" movement in the west, and her essays like "Why Not Move Than one Husband?" "What women Except out of Marriage" and "What They Get" and "The She – Mouse Returns Home" bear it out. Her literary realm is "as honest, it is as human as she is" (Wadia 7).

D.H.Lawrence, one of the most disputed men of genius in the history of the modern English novel, has been excessively praised as well as excessively abused. His pre-occupation with sex has resulted in his being condemned as a sex-maniac. Even eminent critics like T.S.Eliot, have condemned him as an uncultured man insensitive to "ordinary social morality" and I.A.Richard has found fault with him for holding magical

beliefs in an age of science". On the other hand, a host of critics in recent times, like E.M.Forster and F.R. Leavis have stoutly defended him against charges of immortality and obscenity and done much to rehabilitate his reputation, for his novels have depth, and range and subtlety in the presentation of emotion and experience" (51) and E.M.Forster praised him on his death as "greatest imaginative novelist of our generation". He is, no doubt, one of those great artists who write out of internal compulsion for seeking relief for their inner problems. Lawrence writes "like a prophet with a mission, exhorting us to new gestures, embraces and emotions." Quite desirous to rid mankind of the shame complex which leads many people to associate sex activity with indecency, in his prophetic role, his main and persistent purpose was to revolutionize the modern attitude towards sex and believed that one should follow one's instincts. What interested him was "the quality of feeling in human life" (Lall 13) and he sought to break through the deadening habituation of our mental reactions to the world around us and within us. As an excellent and impartial art, he thought that "vivid individual men" matter more than his works of art and in a word, as a novelist, he is a great literary figure in the history of this genre enlarging the essential hope of the novel to a great extent, projecting his works as novels of tension: tension between man and his environment, between man and woman, between man and man.

The lives of most people can be divided into two realms, one which can be exposed to public view and the other which for consideration of propriety and decorum has to be kept concealed. For Kamala Das, there exists no borderline dividing the two worlds. In fact, there are no two worlds for her. Consideration of propriety and decorum do not reek her, they do not even exist for her with the result that for her all truths, all that happened whether to her or to others alike gust to her literary will. For the large majority of people, there is only one kind of truth – factual or objective truth. But for a creative writer, there is another kind – subjective or imaginative truth. What a creative writer visualises with his mental eye is as real to him as what he sees with his physical faculties. That this is true of Lawrence and Kamala Das is clear from an integrated study of all their writings. Kamala Das wrote with frankness using rather richly her mental faculty. She stated this in Preface to *My Story*:

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“I wrote continually, not merely to honour my commitment, but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets, so that I could depart when the time come, with a scrubbed out conscience” (My Story 103)

Many works of Lawrence have concentrated on his life and he used his own experience for literary creations. He worked it into a form in which vestiges of his own past can be easily detected but which exists principally as a work of the imagination. Many of the details of his childhood and adolescence recur in *Sons and Lovers* but the author's personal history is transmuted by his art into a complex work of fiction. Most of the events in *Sons and Lovers* derive source from occasions in Lawrence's own youth, but in every case, they are treated as material to be reshaped and given a new significance. It is easy to believe after reading *Sons and Lovers* that Lawrence's obsessive wanderings through the world once he had broken with were in surrogate search for the family bonds that had been severed with his mother's death. Passionately, though he had loved his mother, as Paul loved Mrs. Morel, one part of Lawrence remained conscious and alone. His elder brother, William Ernest Lawrence drifted carelessly away from his roots once he settled in London but while he lived, he always occupied the main place in his family's heart. Between Lawrence and his family, even between him and his mother, detachment existed of which everyone was instinctively aware. The situation is accurately recaptured in *Sons and Lovers* one of the major impulses behind *Sons and Lovers* was Lawrence's desire to pay tribute to his mother, to pay her some fictional compensation, posthumously, for her suffering and wasted life. On 6 December, 1910, three days before his mother died of cancer, Lawrence wrote to his new financier, Louie Bursows

“Mother has had a devilish married life for nearly forty years and this is the conclusion – no relief. ... she is my first great love ... a wonderful rare woman – as swift as a whip lash and as kind and gentle as warm rain and as steadfast as the irreducible, earth beneath us ... my mother has been passionately fond of me and fiercely jealous” (Spilka 10)

Kamala Das' *My Story* was not written to honour anybody. She wrote with the sole intention of employing all her secrets so that she could depart peacefully when the time came. Secondly, the title *My Story* itself lends to two interpretations. 1. The Story of my life, 2. The story written by me. *My Story* written as it is in the confessional mode is brisk in pace and as it is in the confessional mode is brisk in pace and is held together more by a narration of incidents rather than by a reflection on them. In a sense, her autobiography is curiously static and few incidents seem to contribute to the organic development of her literary personality. She remarks that poets ... cannot close their shops, their mind and as long as they carry it with them, they feel the pressures and torments. A poet's raw material is neither stone nor clay; it is nothing but her personality. She is essentially a writer of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence giving expression to it more nakedly and as a thing in itself than any other Indian woman writer. The reason may be that she seems to have a good deal of the conventional woman in her make up, so that not only is she able to speak of the common woman and her basic need for love and security with inside knowledge, but cannot help, in addition expressing an ambivalence. In *Sons and Lovers*, Miriam is modeled so exclusively on Jessie chambers,

Lawrence's friend. Despite the fact that Miriam was the girl Paul Morel treated quite cruelly, the girl to whom he spoke sharply about her not enjoying sex and his wanting to communicate with, but not to kiss Miriam, nevertheless comes over as a strong female character. She was not just the dreaming girl, who liked looking at flowers and reading books. Apart from her relationship with Paul Morel, she was also a thinking, a feeling girl of her own time, who did not happen to be the right girl in the end for Paul/Lawrence. In Miriam, Lawrence was describing for the first time the kind of female he found guiding and leading him. Whatever he wrote about her, he felt himself, “on the whole she scorned the male sex” (*Sons and Lovers*, 178).

Clara Dawes, is Paul's next sexual or rather romantic excursion. It is from Clara that he learns excitement of sensuality in woman and that a woman can be a definite as a man about wanting sex. Clara was perhaps modeled on Alice Dax and partly on Frieda. She is an interesting character, showing us the kind of world Lawrence had already mingled in and noticed. The women, he knew were thinking people, perhaps intellectual, who were caught up in the suffragette movement. Paul/Lawrence was two-minded about it. Lawrence basically understood women's need to express themselves. He just did not like demanding their vote in that single-minded fashion. To him, there was more at stake for women to sort out. But Paul is interested in Clara, in the same way as Lawrence was presumably interested in Alice Dax. This type of a woman was a teacher to him as she was already striding ahead. He was also sexually attracted to her. So despite her protestations to Miriam, he was not simple attracted to the sensuous woman, the whole type, but to the type of woman who had worked out her own place in the world, and was able to express her own sexuality. He needed that as would any man.

Paul has a lot to learn from Clara. So many times, in *Sons and Lovers*, Paul lets himself to be lectured by his various women. It is Lawrence's way of getting over new ideas. Like Miriam, Clara is rather down on men and caustic in her newly found feminist ideas. She also lectures Paul, on his attitude towards women, for she knows how a girl like Miriam must have suffered at his selfish hand. When Paul is explaining to Clara about Miriam, about what went wrong, he says, ‘she wants the soul out of my body’. Clara asks him how long they had been going together. He says, seven years. Clara retorts,

‘And you haven't found the very first thing about her That she doesn't want any of your soul communion. That's Your own imagination. She wants you...’ (339)

Miriam did want Paul. But she did not give herself totally, until she felt some commitment to him Clara and Miriam became friends, defending each other both to Paul and to Mrs. Morel just as Jessie and Alice Dax supported each other.

Being a creative writer, it is difficult to separate fact from fiction, literal truth from imaginative truth. A creative writer, like a lunatic and a lover is of imagination all compact' and ‘the airy nothings’ to which he gives a ‘local habitation and a name’ are as real to him as the flash and blood creatures of the actual world. Kamala Das says that she was “a practiced teller of while lies” (*My Story* 119). But her ‘lies’ in *My Story*, if they are lies, are not white lies and they serve to blacken her in the eyes of many of her readers. As portrayed in *My Story*, from her early life at the convent Boarding school, sex seems to be her

main subject of interest. Later, in her life, when she returned to Bombay, she 'fell in love with an extremely handsome man "with grey eyes and glossy skin and a beautiful smile" (119). When her son Manoo was in hospital with an attack of polio and she was utterly miserable, the younger man visited her in the hospital. They used to meet often and one day,

"he dressed my hair with scented white flowers plucking them 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 a love to me ... but he said no in my eyes, you are Goddess, I shall not dishonor your body ..." (119)

The grey-eyed man went to Delhi from where he wrote to her a 'silly' letter which fell into her husband's hands and naturally irked him. The young man said in his letter, "If you want to know how much I love you. Count the stars in the sky" (123)

This did not, however, cure her of her infatuation for youth and she still 'yearned for him' (129). But in the meantime, a new lover appeared on the scene. It was Carlo, her old Italian pen friend and the only son of wealthy parents. He took her out to big hotels and he offered to marry her. But he was, she said, not of the divorcing kind. She was however, ready to have a love affair with him. After a brief period of absence, Carlo reappears on the scene. Kamala, who was disgusted with her artificial life in Calcutta, wrote to Carlo and he came and she found solace in his company she was Carlo's 'Sita' (161).

After a search for an 'ideal lover', she found an elderly dark-haired man who was notorious for his 'fabulous lust'. He attracted her "as a serpent draws its dazed victim, I was his slave" (190). Her lustful longing for him kept her awake at night and it was not long before she fell into his arms. She had at last 'found her Krishna'. She does not spare time to forget that she had been Carlo's Sita. But having tried adultery for a short while, she found it distasteful, she began to hate the exploitation of her body. This affair, she says, was the last of her love affair. Soon after she had her first heart complaint and with this bout of illness, she says, "she had shed carnal desire as a snake might shed its skin"(262). The ancient hungers that once tormented me were fulfilled. Of all the people, portrayed in the work, her husband emerges as the sorriest. Her main complaint against him is that her only use to him was to gratify his sexual desire. He neither confided in her nor showed the slightest interest in her problems, always turning of deaf ear to them. She complains that she hated 'his rowdy ways of sex' which he had practiced with his house maids' (P 93).

Even more reprehensive in her opinion, was his attitude to their first child Manoo. He never caressed or fondled him, he hardly ever saw him. However, he became a tender father later on Kamala's marriage was fixed up by her parents without any consideration for her wishes or her fitness for a married life. Perhaps, she has portrayed in *My Story*, the all-round deterioration in our public life.

When she was asked about Carlo and Gino, the lovers mentioned in some of her works, she seemed to be taken aback and replied in a casual way, as though she wanted to evade the question, that all that was an old story, and added that she hoped they were living happily somewhere. The impression one gets is that they are figments of her imagination. She says that she becomes closer to the real life when she writes. These question that one inevitably asks after reading *My Story* is how much of it is true and how much false? The answer is given by Kamala Das herself in an interview she gave to Karuvannoor Ramachandran;

"I have the chastity of a Mother Teresa. No man other than my husband has entered into my thoughts or trespassed even into my dreams. But if one writes about all these, it will have no appeal to the readers. Such books will have no sale" (Kamalas' *Interview*)

From her speeches, it is clear that she is keen on setting up a women's party which may be called 'Manushya Neethi' or 'Rajya Neethi' to fight the present moral crisis, especially the treatment meted out to womanhood in general. Her dissatisfaction over the present state of affairs must have prompted her to contest the parliamentary election in 1984. Hence it is clear that though she has written *My Story* in the first person, it does not mean it is all only the bare facts of life. But as mentioned earlier, she had presented fictionalised facts either of hers or of her close associates.

To what extent, are Lawrence and Kamala Das autobiographical writers and what effect has this on their work as novelists? Both, as a rule projected aspects of themselves and their ideas imaginatively into the characters presented in the novels. These 'heroes' and 'heroines' are not presented to us as models to be admired, nor is their conduct offered as a standard to be accepted by the reader. Rather, they present things as they are, in their varying relationships. To conclude, as writers, both Lawrence and Kamala Das realised that their primary interest lay in revealing through their novels the inner realities or facts of life lived by the characters and both attempted to present to totality of human experience in all its complexity and depth.

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