

A RELOOK AT THE LIFE AND WORKS OF KAMALA DAS
– A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

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SYNOPSIS

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1.0 Introduction

Intensely poignant, deeply psychological, madly emotional, truly confessional, passionately sexual in her literary oeuvre, Everyone wants to express one's self identity, emotions, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, artistic sense, profound and trivial ideas through some means including various art forms such as novel, short story, painting, plays, poetry, autobiography, short stories, sculpture etc as the modern life of human beings, is becoming more and more complex in every sense the word, the 20th century, ever in the history of the human civilization, especially after the two great world wars and after various revolutions which are both industrial and political in nature, is becoming quirky, zappy and funnier in one sense and more philosophical and psychological in other ways. Through the various vicissitudes of life, every stage of man is full of a strange feeling having a touch of esoteric, exotic, a sense of *déjà vu*.

The existentialist problem is gripping every man and woman and the advancement of science is making it more intricate. The psychological and social aspects of human life is facing ever more challenges and bottlenecks. In this context, a woman's position is not an unenviable one given the oppressive forces working against them. Their marginalized position at home and social ladder make them more vulnerable to all sorts assaults in every direction. And the suppressed and shackled mind wants to release from the prison of oppression. Across the world, many women began to break the shackles and began to express their suppressed feelings and emotions and wanted to express their identity. In India too, there were many women who attempted to boldly express their identity and one among them

is Kamala Das. What did Kamala Das make to come out brazenly and break the social taboo? What were the obstacles and difficulties she faced? How was the writer ostracized in the Nair society which is matriarchal basically? And how was she received in the feudal-like society with her new writings which some termed sexual, obscene, and sometimes pornographically explicitly and graphically portrayed in her works of poetry, autobiographical novels and short works of art? Some of these issues have already been dealt with but a relook has become essential and a revaluation has become critical as new books have been published about her after her death. And as any canonized literary work needs to be re-evaluated in a new context to ferret out the inner and hidden meanings as the author intended. Now and then articles and news items appear in news papers about the creativity of the author. As a scholar, I became interested in Kamala Das and her works of art which span many decades.

Now, even after 10 years, exactly after a decade, her life story is currently being paid homage to in two rival biopics that will showcase different aspects of her life – one by Tamil filmmaker Leena Manimekalai and the other by Malayalam director Kamal which will star Manju Warriar as Kamala Das. This is really a great way of paying to the homage to one of the greatest Indian woman author. After reading “*The Love Queen of Malabar – Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das*” written by Merrily Weisbord, a Canadian writer who befriended Kamala Das and had a friendship for more than a decade, it could be understood that the ideas and perceptions Kamala Das had on her life and her literary works have changed to a level which could be said that mellowness has set in her later life. She is talking to Ms. Weisbord in freewheeling mode for nearly 10 years after they started a friendship. Published in 2011 in India, the book reveals the changes from inside out and how she perceives after the publication of “*My Story- An Autobiography*” which shook the Indian literary world with groundbreaking openness. Her frank and no-hold-bar confession in the

autobiography stunned the readers for its openness. Merrily Weisbord shrewdly enters into the heart and mind of Kamala Das, broker a deal for a long term friendship and share their experiences in which Kamala Das relooks at her life, love and her literary oeuvre. This seminal work has thrown in more lights on Kamala Das who impulsively and innocently wrote many things in her autobiography and poetry and other works. After reading the book, my interest in her increased and the dormant feeling i had for many years came out and i decided to explore her works of art again in tandem with new findings about her and her complex and controversial life.

1.1 A brief sketch about Indian Writing in English

In this context, it must be admitted that she was one of the writers whose artistic output such as poetry and novels helped to put Indian writing in English in the world arena. The seed of Indian Writing in English was sown during the period of the British rule in India. Now the seed has blossomed into an ever green tree, fragrant flowers and ripe fruits. The fruits are being tasted not only by the native people, but they are also being 'chewed and digested' by the foreigners. It happened only after the constant caring, pruning and feeding. Gardeners' like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao - to name only a few, looked after the tender plant night and day. In modern time, it is guarded by a number of writers who are getting awards and accolades all over the world.

Indian Writing in English, from being a singular and exceptional, rather gradual native flare - up of geniuses, it has turned out to be a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India converses regularly. Indian Writers - poets, novelists, essayists, and dramatists have been making momentous and considerable contributions to world literature since pre - Independence era, the past few years have witnessed a gigantic prospering and thriving of Indian English Writing in the global. It has already put an imprint as an independent status

in the realm of world Literature. Wide ranges of themes are dealt with in Indian Writing in English. While this literature continues to reflect Indian culture, tradition, social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life in India and Indians living elsewhere, recent Indian English fiction has been trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern predicaments. There are critics and commentators in England and America who appreciate Indian English novels. Prof. M. K. Naik remarks "one of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the west".

1.2 Tagore and Indian Writing in English

In the long line literary luminaries in Indian Writing in English, Rabindranath Tagore is a celebrated name in the sphere of English literature. He was born in 1861 and died in the year 1941 spanning long years of creativity. His creative genius is so much accounting and his literary output is so much rich and varied that the phrase 'myriad - minded', which Mathew Arnold had used for Shakespeare, can aptly be used for him also. He won Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, for his immortal poetic work *Gitanjali* (1913). Besides being a great universal poet, the genius Tagore is also a novelist, dramatist, Short - Story writer, musician, philosopher, painter, educationalist, reformer and critic in every field and had earned a niche for himself. The setting of his novel is representative and reflective, their characters are natural, realistic, full - blooded and life - like. The socio - religious culture of Bengal is brilliantly portrayed in his novels. Through his novels he brings out some of the problems of the woman of his age. Different kinds of human relations are portrayed and analyzed through the different social settings. Some of his novels deal with the modern problems of our society and the interest in them centers round the psychological development of characters under the compelling stress of circumstances. To his credit, there is a long list of

poems and plays, both in Bengali and English which had made his place among the world's greatest writers.

1.3 Indian Women writers and IWE

In the twentieth century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who have money and are mostly western education. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. The publishers feel that the literature actually survives because of these types of bold topics and commercials used by the women novelists. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. Their write - ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche, which has no accessibility. The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife.

1.4 A Relook at the Contribution of Kamala Das

Critiquing about Kamala Das' poetry is most moving and tortured. There is a sexual 'brazenness to her persona', which barely hides her inmost ferment. Credited as the most outspoken - and even controversial writer, Kamala Das now earned fame as the 'voice of women's sexuality'. Apart from writing in English, Das also wrote under the pen name Madhavikutty in Malayalam before her conversion to Islam ten years ago . She had not only established herself as an English writer. Her popularity in Kerala was credited mostly to her short stories and the autobiographical *My Story*, which was translated into 15 languages, a book where she openly discussed her unsatisfactory sexual life with her husband Madhava Das.

While her autobiography **My Story** gives several descriptions of her own marriage as unsatisfying and unfulfilling, her poems presented an image of a marriage with lifeless, empty and dull. Born into a literary family, Kamala Das' mother, Balamani Amma and Uncle Nalapat Narayana Menon, were both leading poets. Das began writing only after her early marriage – only to cope up with – the emotional strain she was undergoing. She was born on March 31, 1934 in Malabar, Kerala.

Das once herself said in an interview to the Warrior, "I always wanted love, and if you don't get it within your home, you stray a little". Though some might label Das as "a feminist" for her candour in dealing with women's needs and desires, Das, according to many others has never tried to identify herself with any particular version of feminist activism. Poet Eunice de Souza claims that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms". Kamala Suraiyya Das had ventured into areas unclaimed by society and provided a point of reference for her colleagues. She had transcended the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman. Kamala Das has published many novels and short stories in English, as well as in Malayalam. Some of her work in English includes the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), a collection of short stories called *Padmavati, The Harlot and Other Stories* (1992), in addition to five books of poetry: *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985), and *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996) - a collection of poetry with Pritish Nandy (1990) and her autobiography, *My Story* (1976). Some of her novels in Malayalam language *Palayan* (1990), *Neypayasam* (1991), and *Dayarikkurippukal* (1992). Kamala Das lived alone in her world with feelings of loneliness and yet she maintained her tradition, the security of her home. She always felt that poetry

meant studying life and its objectivity in a very realistic way. Kamala Das died at the age of 75.

One of the important components of research action is preparing, collecting and storing the review of related literature about the topic the scholar has chosen for pursuing research in that particular area in order to find out what other scholars have done on the particular topics and how they had already dealt with it. This component of research would be a guiding force to the scholar as their ideas would be a sort of guiding force as pointed earlier. Therefore, the scholar is supposed to give much importance and prepare the ground before jumping into the other components. In order to prepare and study and review the related literature, the scholar has go far and wide and attempt to collect as much literatures as possible leaving no stone unturned otherwise the attempts by the scholar would a repetition of the research work. Therefore, this has taken particular interests and paid serious attention to the collection of primary and secondary data about the related literature. One must the question what is the definition of a review of related literature. It means a relentless search and evaluation of the available literature in the given subject or chosen topic area. It documents the state of the art with respect to the subject or topic you are writing about.

1.5 My Story: An Autobiography

This is what Sheryl Sebastian paints about Kamala Das autobiographical story in “***My Story: An Autobiography***” which was published in 1973, her autobiography ‘***Ente Kadha***’ (***My Story***) was released in Malayalam. It consisted of a compilation of her weekly columns in *Malayalanadu* that had already become a sensation across the state. Fifteen years later, it was translated into English with more text added, many parts rewritten and published with the title ‘***My Story***’. Among the major critics on Kamala Das, **K.Sachithananthan**, is a very

important one with his bold views on her literary works. In the beginning of her career itself, it was he who paid much attention to critique her works.

This is how she continues to explore about Kamala Das' autobiography. The book is about her personal and professional experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society and her quest for love in its truest form. Her writing consisted of vivid descriptions of menstruation, puberty, love, lust, lesbian encounters, child marriage, infidelity and physical intimacy. She introduced her readers to the concept of female sexuality, a notion that was nonexistent until then. She talked of her 'brush with love' with an eighteen year old girl, right before Das was about to be married off. She talked of having to look for love 'outside its legal orbit' because she was unhappy in her loveless marriage. She talked with an audacity never seen before as she wrote unapologetically about everything the conservative Kerala society had managed to box in for very long. It managed to evoke such a widespread reaction which was equal parts shock and equal parts adoration that it has become a cult classic in the genre of Indian autobiographies ever since. On being asked why her book shocked the Malayali audience, she felt that it never actually did, that they were pretending to be shocked to prove their 'innocence'. She believed she was merely being vocal about things that had been happening for years.

1.6 Critical Views on Other Works

In her critical review of Kamala Das, Ms. Sebastian opines that Das went on to produce what is considered some of the best work in modern Indian literature. Some of her notable works in English are the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), the collection of short stories *Padmavati the Harlot and other stories* (1992) and a compilation of her poetry *Summer in Calcutta* (1973). In Malayalam, they include *Balyakalasmaranakal* (The Memories of Childhood), *Chandanamarangal* (Sandalwood Trees) and many more. Her literary work

earned her a lot of recognition and won her numerous accolades. She won the P.E.N.'s Asian Poetry Prize in 1963, the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1969 for the short story *Thanuppu* (Cold) and the National Sahitya Academy Award in 1985. She was also shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. So wide was her reach that much of her work has been translated into numerous foreign languages including French and German.

1.7 Assessment of Devindra Kohli on Kamala Das

Devindra Kohli, one of the early critics who assessed the literary oeuvre of Kamala Das at the beginning of her writing career, has come out with excellent and incisive critical analysis all these years. His critical assessment about Kamala Das' works is being considered the touchstone for measuring the literary values. In 2011, in a freewheeling recollections, in the *Hindu*, Kohli summed up succinctly about Kamala Das and her works as :

In 1968, 10 years before I first met her, in response to my rather harsh criticism of some of the poems in The Descendants in comparison with what I considered the more accomplished Summer in Calcutta, Kamala wrote to me attributing the falling-off of her poetry, paradoxically, to a "curled like an old mongrel" contentment in love. Significantly, this posited a connection between discontentment and poetry. Is poetry, and love poetry in particular, nourished by dissatisfaction, a sense of unattained or unattainable love and happiness? The question, "Does the imagination dwell the most/ Upon a woman won or woman lost?" haunted W. B. Yeats throughout his poetic career; and Maud Gonne, his unrequited Muse, applauded him for making "beautiful poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that".

1.8 Merrily Weisbord's "*The Queen of Malabar – A Memoir*"

One of the most important books on Kamala Das was published by Merrily Weisbord in 2010 in Canada and in 2011 in India after the author's death. The book came to be necessitated after Merrily Weisbord brokered a friendship deal with Das to share their experiences each other and have good literary career. Therefore, Merrily Weisbord came to Kerala and live with the author and Das went to Canada to live with Merrily Weisbord. It was a wonderful friendship while both of them were widows, writers and had lots of time to share their experiences as feminists too. *The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das* presumably the last of the critical analysis in full book length. Earlier there have been critical essays being done on Kamala Das. There have been re-interpretations, relooks, reinventions and a kind of rewriting on her literary oeuvre. This particular book *The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das* raised literary storm by bringing in new ideas and perceptions which Das shared with Merrily Weisbord especially at the fag end of her life. Das' conversion to Islam and her subsequent marriage were surprises to Merrily Weisbord as she was in dark even though both of them had close relationships for more than 10 years viz., 1995 -2005. Weisbord's account and assessment of Kamala Das' life and literary works throw new lights which are attention seeking and demand a new look at her ideas and perceptions. At one point, Das informs Weisbord that she was happy with her married life, for she enjoyed the safety and security and love and care given by her husband even though she accused of marital rape during her first night after marriage at a tender age 16. When asked if she changed her view, she informs her that she had per se safety and security and love from her husband (*The Love Queen of Malabar: Memoir of a Friendship with Kamala Das* , pp.33).

1.9 Objectives of the Study

1. To re-evaluate the Kamala Das' literary works viz., her autobiography, poetry collections, and novels.
2. To study the Indian social taboos and its impact on women's life as found in her Das' poetry.
3. To study approaches to literature including feminism.
4. To explore the writing style and strategies employed by Kamala Das in her literary oeuvre
5. To explore human relationship and study the implications on the persona of Kamala Das
6. To critically examine the literary style employed by Das in her novels especially the discourse style, narrative technique etc.,
7. To study the motifs, symbols and other aspects of Indian culture in the literary works of Kamala Das

1.10 Significance of the Study

T.S. Eliot wrote that he wrote poetry which is complex and abstract because modern life is complex and abstract. Kamala Das, even though her style is minimalist, took upon herself and began to redefine about the human relationship between husband and wife, between friends, between man vs. Woman in general. The significance of this research work is that Kamala Das chose many media to express herself through poetry, prose, stories and even autobiography which she was compelled to write on her deathbed. With various aliases, Kamala Das has chosen to primarily write poetry to express her feelings, emotions, ideas, thoughts and passions. She took this mode to express herself identity and thereby free herself from the shackles of social oppressions and suppressions. In each and every poem or work of

art, Kamala Das attempts to articulate the inner meaning of relationship on various plane i.e., between man and woman husband and wife, father and mother, father and sons, mother and sons and vice versa. Between friends and between man and animals and plants, man vs nature - all kinds of relationship is investigated at various layers. Both on the surface and subtext level, the authors attempt to uncover the inner feelings and hidden human thoughts. The psyche of woman with various personas is being expressed in her poetry and other works of art. The significance of this study is that the interpretations being already advanced need to be relooked and reinterpreted taking into account the new studies coming out recently. As the studies have close relationship with the writer, there is much significance in this study to the effect that new ideas about Kamala Das and Her literary works would come out.

1.11 Need for the Study

It is true that the works of Kamala Das been researched in a substantial level. To prove the fact that she is a still great writer to reckon with, her has been in news and in the academic circle all these years even after her death. However, there has been a new set of articles, research studies and full length books and biopic Kamala Das which have helped to stoke the embers of literary values of Kamala Das. Every literature which has undergone various investigations and measured on various benchmarks, the works of Kamala Das need to be re-evaluated critically in the light of new publications and old critical analysis. Everything has a second opinion. Therefore, the scholar felt that the literary oeuvre of Kamala Das , especially after her death, need to have a relook and her literary works must be made to be put on the literary anatomical table and dissected to have new ideas and interpretations about her poetry and autobiography. Of course, Das has been condemned, praised, ridiculed, reviled, denounced and criticized unfairly and unfairly. Without her, there is no Indian Writing in English which has come a long way after the British left India

leaving a great legacy which is the English language. In the anthology entitled “ *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*” edited by Aravind Krishna Mehrotra and published by Oxford University Press in 1993, she was touted as an indispensable poet in the arena of Indian literary scene.

1.12 Statement of the Problem

One of the main objectives of this dissertation is to look into the odyssey of Kamala Das to find out herself and self identity. She pours out from her heart her passions, emotions, feelings, intense thoughts and ideas the *raison d’ etre* of human life. There is a sort of existential problem in her inner self and she seeks answers for all. Through her literary works, she seeks to show who she is, what the constitution of her mind and body and her purpose of life in this planet. That is why she goes on in many *plume de noms* including Madhavikutty, Kamala Das, and Kamala Surayya. And one must remember that she was earlier eulogizing Lord Krishna in her poems and later she converted to Islam dumping Hinduism. How such a metamorphosis was possible is big question for any serious reader of Kamala Das. What went on her mind and what inner thoughts drove her to drastically change her ? As is bound by a sort of witchcraft , how Kamala Das metamorphosed from one persona into another persona ? These issues are really interesting for any reader of Das.

1.13 Research Methodology

The original text books of Kamala Das were are to be taken up for a close reading to reassess critically textually and contextually. How she has transformed herself would be assessed to have relook and rereading of her literary works. All the major secondary sources would be taken up for discussion including printed books, journals, magazines, dictionaries, encyclopedia, yearbook, online sources, audio and video sources available in the web and dissertations done on her works.

1.14 Hypotheses

There are five hypotheses of this research dissertation as following:

1. That Kamala Das needs to be relooked in the context of new articles and books published recently especially after her death.
2. Kamala Das is an author who has been negatively riled for wrong reasons and that should be set right.
3. That Kamala Das was a victim and the victimhood made her to go through various persona and that was expressed in her literary works.
4. All through the poems of Kamala Das, she endeavored to express herself identity and seek a sort of fulfillment through her works of art especially her poetry.
5. There is an urgent need to put her in proper perspective by investigating her works of art textually and contextually.

1.15 Social Significance of this Research Study

In this age of digital era, women's rights group are voicing their concern over the safety of women and girl children. That many accuse and confess that harassment of women and children start at home is true in many cases. Women, in spite of their progress economically and socially, still feel they are being oppressed and suppressed and are not given equal opportunity like the male children. There are lots of partialities even at home. Even in highly educated families, women complain of harassment. Now many women are attempting to come out of their chained self and seek freedom of thought and equal opportunity. The study of Kamala Das who was a pioneer as feminist and fighter for women rights through words and deeds would help the womenfolk to have relook at their own lives and the awareness would help them to adjust according to the context. The beginning of the 21st century is not supportive to women as violence against women and girl children are

increasing incessantly. Therefore, the research scholar is confident that the outcome of the study of Kamala Das about how she struggled against male dominated society and how she could singlehandedly won the battle would be a great strength to the womenfolk.

1.16 Frame Work of the Thesis

In **Chapter One** the scholar has earmarked for a comprehensive survey of Indian Writing in English and the role of Kamala Das and her contribution to it. The chapter also discusses how every human being wants to express emotions, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, artistic sense, profound and trivial ideas in some ways. There are a slew of ways to express their identity such as art, photography, dramatic arts, poetry, prose, stories etc., as the modern life of human beings, is becoming more and more complex in every sense the word, the 20th century, ever in the history of the human civilization, especially after the two great world wars and after various revolutions which are both industrial and political in nature, is becoming quirky, zappy and funnier in one sense and more philosophical and psychological in other ways. Through the various vicissitudes of life, every stage of man is full of a strange feeling having a touch of esoteric, exotic, a sense of déjà vu. In the **Chapter Two**, the review of related literature is discussed in detail. Furthermore, the significance of the study, the need for the study, the hypotheses of the dissertation, the social significance, the objectives of the study are being given. In the **Chapter Three**, the works of Kamala Das have been taken up for detailed discussion and the scholar has attempted to have second look at the critical knowledge about the literary oeuvre of Kamala Das. In the **Chapter Four** the scholar has evaluated in the context of new ideas generated after and before the death of Kamala Das. After the publication of *My Story- An Autobiography*, lots of new ideas and perspectives regarding her life and literary oeuvre have come out. The literary works have been taken up and investigated textually. How she herself has self-contradicted in her persona and literary

works and her perspectives on various issues including religion and culture have been put forth to the readers. All her major literary work has been taken up for investigation individually and discussed critically.

1.17 Das' Literary Works

Kamala Das, to her credits, had touched almost all genre viz., poetry, prose, short stories, novels, autobiography and was bilingual - Malayalam and English. The following literary works to be taken up for discussion and for reinvestigation are given here in under. The genre has been taken for revaluation in the order of autobiography, poetry, novel, short stories and travel writings.

1.18 *My Story* – *An Autobiography* – A Psychological Critical Relook

Before Kamala Das, some other Indian women writers have been lauded for their psychological approach to their characters in their novels and works of art. Among them, Toru Dutt stands first with her two literary outputs. Even though young, she was able to create two important novels which were published posthumously. One was written in English language and another one was written in French language. In both the novels, Dutt had attempted to explore the inner recesses of feminine characteristics. Her psychological description even in those olden days was critically acclaimed but unfortunately, she died very young. Even her own father came to know of her literary value only after her death. Therefore, in the history of modern India, Toru Dutt could be counted as the first woman writer to explore female characters' psychological working of the minds. Meena T. Pillai, renowned writer and critic, "Kamala Das : On translating *My Story* " postulates that an autobiography is considered a genre of literature where the umbilical cord between the story and the reality, the writer and the text, the signifier and the signified is yet intact. Kamala Das is one of the few writers in India who could snip this cord with élan, explicating in the

process that all writings are constructed and all realities staged in language. Further, she notes that James Olney speaks of how it is impossible for an autobiographer to write the image double of her life instead having to create herself afresh at every moment within the text. This might be the reason why Das chose not to go for a literal translation of *Ente Katha* into English but a creative retelling aiming towards textual equivalence. This is what she has to say in an interview “.

In “*My Story By Kamala Das- An Intense Autobiographical Account*,” Anushri Mondal asserts that the entire account written in the format of a novel is captivating with all the intimate details of her childhood followed by her youth and middle age. Born with skin not so fair—a dusky complexion to be precise, Kamala portrays herself as an inquisitive child who faced the triggers of race especially when India was gripped by the British imperialists. Brought up in convent schools Kamala faced discrimination at an early age when the word “racism” probably did not enter her vocabulary. Struggling through her life amidst the parochial, patriarchal society, Kamala had to submit when she had to marry an almost brutal man against her wish, that too, at the tender age of sixteen. Almost molested and raped by this insensitive man in the name of a husband, Kamala makes an attempt to find happiness in the world of her own—the world inhabited by the muses of literature enabling her in poetic and prosaic compositions. It will be wrong to say that she found bliss only in the world of creation. This is because, frustrated and exasperated by husband’s treatment and doomed in an unhappy marital bond, Kamala determines herself not to be tied up by the established norms of a ‘*pativrata naari*’ (a women devoted solely to one’s husband) and makes every attempt to respond to the charms bestowed upon her by other men. In this manner, she is shown to have a string of short and long term relationships, perhaps in on her way of being the rebel in a society of the late 20th century when traditionalism was the established norm

and rebellion, that too among women, was considered a taboo. The scenario has remained almost the same in the present day to a large extent. Such acts reflect the spirit of boldness and a complete disrespect for the societal norms.

The novel comprising of 50 chapters, consist of self composed poems expressing the core of meaningfulness or meaninglessness pervading her life at large. The poems occurs in the last 13 chapters (from chapter 27 onwards) when her life becomes preoccupied with greater responsibilities and when she starts fearing the presence of the Spiritual power controlling all our lives, the power whom we are unable to fight with our meager human prowess. Other than the relationship with her husband at home with whom she starts inhabiting from an early age, her relationship with her great grandmother is given prominence. For her, the figure of the great grandmother is portrayed as a silent listener who listened to her disturbed soul without any interruptions as she was unable to move under the burden of perpetual paralysis that confined her to the bed. But such a lack of response didn't prevent her to develop an intimate relationship. This was precisely the reason that helped in nurturing the relationship in a way she wanted. The old lady due to her paralyzed state was the only one whom she could trust and open her heart out without the fear of being punished for her actions.

1.20 Sylvia Plath and Confessional Mode

In this context, the research would like to throw some lights on the definition of confessional poetry as it directly deals with psychological aspect of a character or content. This is a style of poetry that emerged in the United States during the 1950s. It has been described as poetry of the personal or "I", focusing on extreme moments of individual experience, the psyche, and personal trauma, including previously and occasionally still taboo matters such as mental illness, sexuality, and suicide, often set in relation to broader social

themes. It is sometimes also classified as Postmodernism. It also may be noted here that 'the school of "Confessional poetry" was associated with several poets who redefined American poetry in the 1950s and 1960s, including **Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, and W. D. Snodgrass.**' Among other key texts of the American "confessional" school of poetry include Plath's *Ariel*, Berryman's *The Dream Songs*, and Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, though Berryman himself rejected the label "with rage and contempt". In this genre, another significant, if transitional figure was Adrienne Rich; while one of the most prominent, consciously "confessional" poets to emerge in the 1980s was Sharon Olds whose focus on taboo sexual subject matter built off of the work of Ginsberg. However, among the confessional writers, Sylvia Plath was one of the prominent women writers in the confessional mode.

Sylvia Plath is commonly seen as a confessional poet, although some critics dispute her placement within this movement, arguing that her work is more universal than commonly assumed. Nevertheless, *Ariel*, published posthumously in 1965, deals with the very personal issues of suicide, sex, her children, and, most dramatically, her complicated relationship with her deceased father. Poems like "**Daddy**," "**Ariel**," and "**Lady Lazarus**" are stunning in their originality, wit, and brutality.

1.20 Anne Sexton and Confessional mode

According to Grade saver, Anne Sexton wrote poetry that dealt with her personal life, including her experiences with psychotherapy, sex, depression, and rage. One of her most significant works, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), dealt with such excruciating topics as molestation by a father. The confessional poets have garnered a lot of critical interest, but there is a tendency to conflate their art and lives too fully - the usage of a personal pronoun in

their work is not an unequivocal invitation to assume that the subject of the poem is always the poet.

Earlier from the Hindu outfits, she faced death threats. And more intrigue in the life of Kamala Das is that she, at the verge of her death, she almost disowned Islam. And she confessed to Merrily Weisbord that it is not she wants to disown Islam but the religion as a system. But happily, she met death and willed that she should be buried in a graveyard near a mosque. That was how Kamala Das change from persona to persona and went through a troubled life. If one reads Merrily Weisbord's "*The Queen of Malabar- A Memoir of Friendship*", her life and story entirely different from what one reads her "*My Story*". In the former, she repudiates many things which she has confessed in *My Story* which includes her rubbishing her husband and his loveless attitude towards her. Later she confided to Merrily that she was grateful to Mr. Das for having provided a safe and secured live with, of course, love.

One of the mysterious and inexplicable things in her life her conversion to Islam. Born in a conservative Hindu Nair (*Nallappattu*) family having royal ancestry, After being asked by her lover Sadiq Ali, an Islamic scholar and a Muslim League MP, she embraced Islam in 1999 at the age of 65 and assumed the name Kamala Surayya. After converting, she wrote:

Life has changed for me since Nov. 14 when a young man named Sadiq Ali walked in to meet me. He is 38 and has a beautiful smile. Afterwards he began to woo me on the phone from Abu Dhabi and Dubai, reciting Urdu couplets and telling me of what he would do to me after our marriage. I took my nurse Mini and went to his place in my car. I stayed with him for three days. There was a sunlit river, some trees, and a lot of

laughter. He asked me to become a Muslim which I did on my return home.(TOI, 2001)

Das' conversion was rather controversial, among social and literary circles, with The Hindu calling it part of her "histrionics". She said she liked being behind the protective veil of the purdah. Later, she felt it was not worth it to change one's religion and said "I fell in love with a Muslim after my husband's death. He was kind and generous in the beginning. But I now feel one shouldn't change one's religion. It is not worth it."

Her desire to revert to Hinduism was discouraged by her eldest son, who feared that Muslim radicals would murder her and the entire family. Though never politically active before, she launched a national political party, Lok Seva Party, aiming asylum to orphaned mothers and promotion of secularism. In 1984 she unsuccessfully contested in the Indian Parliament elections. She had a sexual relationship with Sadiq Ali, an Islamic scholar who was much younger in age. She herself describes her visit to Sadiq Ali's home as follows:

"I was almost asleep when Sadiq Ali climbed in beside me, holding me, breathing softly, whispering endearments, kissing my face, breasts ... and when he entered me, it was the first time I had ever experienced what it was like to feel a man from the inside."

1.21 Kamala Das' Poetry – A Critical Relook

She once claimed that "poetry does not sell in this country," but her forthright columns, which sounded off on everything from women's issues and child care to politics, were popular. Das' first book of poetry, *Summer In Calcutta* was a breath of fresh air in Indian English poetry. She wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish. Ms. Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and body at a time when Indian poets were still governed by

"19th-century diction, sentiment and romanticized love." Her second book of poetry, *The Descendants* was even more explicit, urging women to:

*Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers ..."* –

(The Looking Glass)

Kamala Das expresses the identity and distinction both as a woman and writer. Her other works are good but her autobiography is certainly better. It is written in the form a novel, well designed, informative, and delightful. It can be read as a confession. She has never tried to hide anything from her readers. In other way, this is a revolutionary book. It is a story of a shameful society where males do not properly respect women. Women writers focus on the conflicts in man-woman relationship and the female psyche conditioning it to survive the oppressive forces. The post-independence Indian woman is aware of her rights, virtues, and duties and of convention. She has complete knowledge of her heritage and is proud to be part of the great tradition. Social obligations and moral responsibilities have conditioned her. She is also aware of her fears, weaknesses and limitations; the length of the road she can tread upon, the dangers she has to overcome. **An Apology to Cantama** deals with the adultery of the woman persona. While her husband holds her woman form, her lover holds her very soul. **The Testing of the Sirens** also deals with adultery. The husband persona says to his wife :

I'm happy just being with you. But....

You love another.

1.22 Das' Lord Krishna's Vision vs Prophet Mohammed's Luminance

In her poem "*Love*", we find the same note of religious dilemma. It ironically depicts the mood of confession and revulsion that takes possession of the poet. Once again, she compares the mouth of the lover to the sun which brings both the heat and the loss of love and due to failure in achieving fulfillment of love, she longs for God's love i.e., Krishna's love: Of what does the burning mouth Of sun, burning in today's sky Remind me oh yes his mouth and... His limbs like pale and carnivorous Plants reaching out for me The sad lie of my unending lust. Although Das regards the rituals and observances of Hinduism and it shows that she is a believer of Nirguna-Brahman, the Distinctionless Reality (attributeless). God is the one unified force the primal flood, the moving fount of Being in Hindu mythopoeia, the Brahman of the Advait philosophy:- "The undying reality/Which doesn't dissolve though?/All beings dissolve". (150) It is obvious that Das does not look for God head in the figure of Lord Krishna, she rather seeks for an ideal lover in the figure of Krishna. In fact, her search for an ideal lover is rooted in her deep sense of alienation. She languished in the folds of a matrilineal society that was quickly shifting its centre of gravity towards a male hegemonic society.

1.23 Annamalai Poems

Besides, Kamala Das's philosophical dilemma finds true expression in her collected and series of "*Annamalai Poems*". Here, we find the poet is vacillating between truth and falsehood, deception and no deception, to be and not to be. It means, she lives in the world of desires, devices, love, sex, frustration and falsehood. She can never dream of deceiving others without being undeceived. In this attempt to manipulate the world through her frustrated life, she loses the war of motives frequently and hence she is on the altar of liberation. In spite of all difficulties, she goes on revolting and proves the wisdom of youthfulness for spiritualism.

She tries to keep herself aloof in order to hear the voice of God but it is not possible for her because of the restricting orthodox and crazy Nair society. So she is disappointed but sometimes she also gets consolation that God Krishna can never be heard in the crazy and crowded surrounding if one sticks to truth like Ezekiel. She went to Annamalai mountain serves as a symbol of woman's indomitable will power and long lasting endurance. Women, at large, have been put on ordeals be it Sita, Savitri or Lady Lazarus or miserable women at grass roots level. In every trial, they have stood exceptionally enduring and victorious that certifies their miraculous capability to lead society to a better and balanced future. These poems are untitled yet they are called "Annamalai Poems". "Annamalai Poems" express the poet's philosophical dilemma about the idea of certainty and uncertainty. The first poem of the series dwells on the severe torture of her body and mind. It relates her frequent visit to the hill region's serpentine path that leads the traveller up and down where tattered peasants beckon her

1.24 Colombo Poems

Kamala Das is essentially an introvert and her mood is feministic and confessional. Through her feminism and confessional mode, she always expresses her note of tension and dilemma. She has always responded to the situations of human suffering and pain with great sensitivity and compassion. The ethnic violence in Sri Lanka and the situation of pain, distress and suffering prevailed. On the island especially after 1983, have created compassionate stirring and indignation in Kamala Das. She is one of the few Indian poets who have assimilated the passion and emotion let loose by the Sri Lankan imbroglio.

The "*Colombo Poems*" mark the widening of the poet's dilemma from caste oppression outside India. The poems inspired by the poet's Sri Lankan experiences remarked Nair in The Poetry of Kamala Das: "are an indication that she is capable of breaking the self

mode cocoon of brooding over male inequity and female vulnerability". These poems are a testimony to her involvement in the fate of people with whom she is racially related. With these poems, the poet covers all forms of oppression i.e. men vs. women, state vs individual, dominant cultures vs. marginal sub-cultures, rich vs poor and the White/Aryans vs. Black Dravidians. The main preoccupation in the "*Colombo Poems*" revolves round the human beings that suffer on account of racial prejudice, cultural and linguistic chauvinism.

1.25 Alphabets of Lust and Other Stories

Eroticism, feminism and psychological process are important elements in *the Alphabets of Lust*, and *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories*. Kamala Das is an *enfant terrible* of the Indian literary scene. Even well into late middle age. Rakishly sensual in her poems and prose, Das, in this collection of short stories, no longer seeks to shock. With sensitivity Das takes us behind the *purdah* into the tattered world of the down-and-out woman - prostitutes, some with the proverbial golden heart. And some more sinned against than sinning.

There are no villains, only the force of circumstance and the weakness of men. Underneath the sadistic exterior of the policeman who likes little girls, lies compassion. Padmavati, the middle-aged prostitute who sells herself for her family, only to be shunned by them, yearns only for the gods, who treat her no better than her clients did. As the other woman, the kept woman who only wants her man's love. Das doesn't shriek about oppression, which sits like a bell jar over her protagonists who lead lives of quiet desperation. There's no whisper of sloganeering or feminism. But by unfolding the everyday life, she has painted an unforgettable picture of the exploitation of all women. Particularly moving is *A Doll for the Child Prostitute*, the centre piece of this volume. Through Rukmani, the 12-year-

old girl sold to a brothel by her mother, Das shows that neither compassion nor emotions have entirely fled these sordid surroundings. Kamala Das's short story *A Little Kitten* is part of a new anthology – The Parrots of Desire – that puts together Indian erotic writing composed over 3,000 years. In this short story, A Little Kitten, Kamala Das looks at marriage and marital infidelities.

When they had finally settled themselves down after weeks of honeymooning in a small flat 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 his insurance firm at the heart of the city. If only you could get me a pet, she murmured, nestling closer to his chest, a little kitten, even a kitten would be such a comfort... And, he threw back his head and laughed. What a sweet and innocent creature he had married! He tickled her until she rolled over on their double bed and screamed out for mercy. You are killing me, please stop, PLEASE STOP. Then, he began to lick her toes, mumbling, you see, I am your kitten, I am your little kitten. After three months of ardour, they began to quarrel. Nothing very serious, of course. Just a few probing queries regarding his relationship with Miss Nadkar, his secretary, and his mysterious silences that would last for hours. Speak to me, I cannot bear these silences. Leave me alone, he would say and disappear into the bathroom. One day, she climbed upon a stool and peeped into the bathroom through the ventilator. He was seated on the edge of the tub, frowning. What are you doing there, she shouted at him. He got up and pulled the ventilator shut. It nearly snapped off her fingers. No wonder she was angry and frustrated. When they were on the best of terms she used to take a bath in the evening after tea and buy a jasmine strand from the flower boy to hang from her long plait.

Therefore, the existential question is: *to write or to die?* Kamala Das chose the former rather than meeting death. So, we, the readers, got her “My Story- An Autobiography”. And

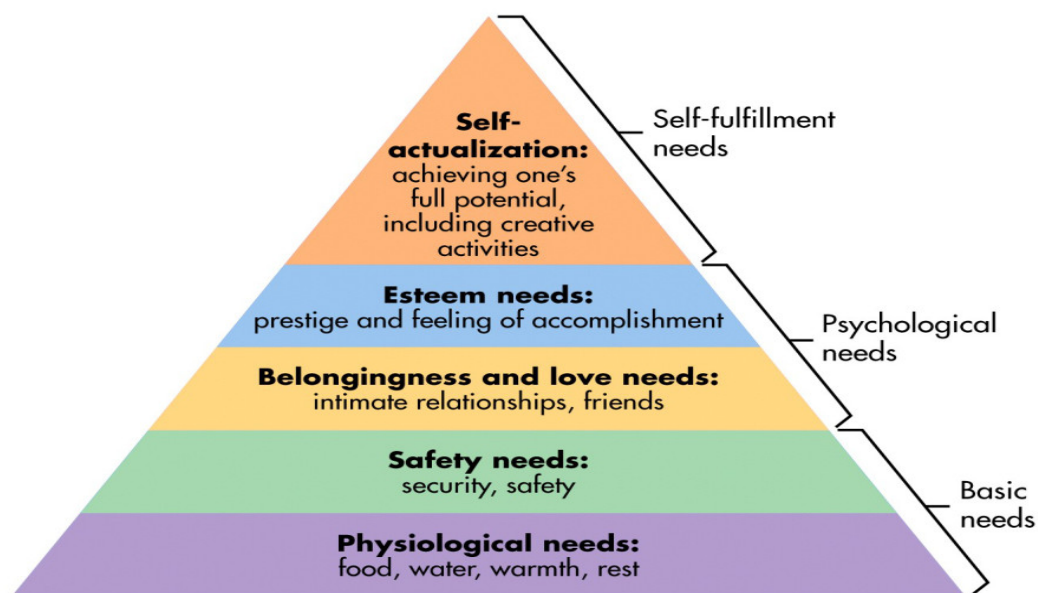
Das' decision to go all out in pouring her emotions, inner feelings led her to become one of the celebrated writer – poet, short story writer, novelist, travelogue writer etc., Shahnaz Hibib, in the Guardian Obituary, in 2009, observed that the passing of Kamala Das is a great loss to the corpus of Indian writing in English. In *My Story* (1976), she recounted the trials of her marriage and her painful self-awakening as a woman and writer. She became an icon for women, in India and elsewhere, struggling to liberate themselves from sexual and domestic oppression. Though it was supposed to be an autobiography (and indeed was provocatively subtitled "the compelling autobiography of the most controversial Indian writer") Das later admitted that there was plenty of fiction in *My Story*. Perhaps "biomythography" would have been a fairer description of the book. Das's rebellions were more multidimensional than she was given credit for. Her female protagonists were not simply in pursuit of sexual freedom, they were in search of poetry, intimacy and divinity. Characters such as Padmavathi the harlot, who drags her bruised body to a holy shrine, personify the unworldly wisdom with which Das endowed her best female protagonists. She also created several nuanced male characters, for example, the hapless father in the 1991 short story *Neypayasam*, who shelters his children from their mother's death.

In this context, one must understand that all the needs are not compartmentalized rigidly. The needs of human beings are arranged in hierarchical order which need not be independent and progressive step by step and linear. There may be overlapping in their needs and it depends on individual person whose needs attention according to the psychological traits. Therefore, if certain needs are not achieved, it leads to an increase in displeasure within an individual. In return, when individuals feel this increase in displeasure, the motivation to decrease these discrepancies increases. Physiological needs can be defined as both traits and a state. Physiological needs as traits allude to long-term, unchanging demands

that are required of basic human life. Physiological needs as a state allude to the unpleasant decrease in pleasure and the increase for an incentive to fulfill a necessity. In order to pursue intrinsic motivation higher up Maslow's hierarchy, physiological needs 'must be met first'. This means that if a human is struggling to meet their physiological needs, then they are unlikely to intrinsically pursue safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. The physiological needs include:

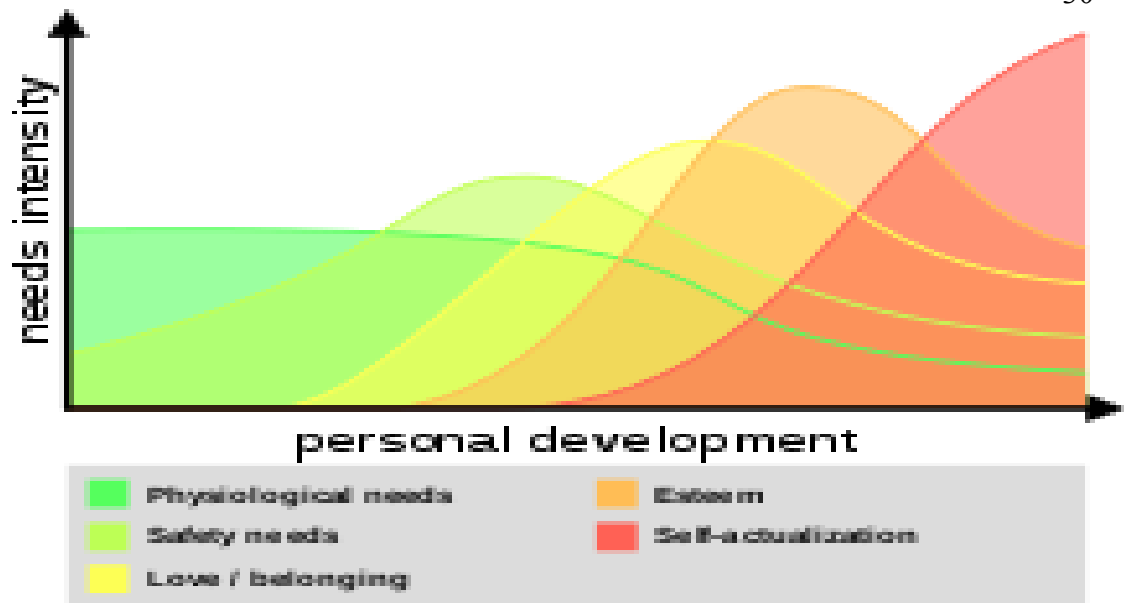
1. *Homeostasis*
2. *Food*
3. *Water*
4. *Sleep*
5. *Clothes*
6. *Shelter* and
7. *Sex*

The following pyramid diagram shows the needs of every human being according to Abraham Maslow:



Maslow's Pyramid Diagram

In the above diagram the needs are arranged in hierarchical order according to the theory of Maslow. However, certain other psychologists have disagreed this Need theory and they have come out with their own Need Theories. In the following diagram, the overlapping could be noticed with the four needs crisscrossing and extending beyond the individual domain. In the case Kamala Das, she attempts to reveal different persona and the metamorphosis is complex and astounding to the lay readers as she changes her persona according to her need. The basic need for love and sex are not fulfilled according to her first novel *My Story- An Autobiography*. Of course, she is changing her stand very often and she perplexes the readers with her ever changing perceptions on various issues. As for the Social and Safety needs, she goes to the extent of converting to Islam as she has confessed at various points of her life that she finds safety in the Islam religion. Therefore, she writes various poems to put faith in Allah. The self-actualization does happen when she gives up Hindu religion. Earlier, Kamala Das was holding Lord Krishna as lover, husband, friend, and what not. She sees Lord Krishana in her first son before his birth. When she feels him kicking in her womb, she pray to Lord Krishna to give her a son like Him. However, later the same poet converts and goes on writing a number of poems in praise of Prophet Mohammed in the place of Lord Krishna. There is, of course, so much self-contradiction, but can one blame Kamala Das for changing her stance in different faiths turning the table upside down. In the following diagram, one can understand the need intensity of a human being and the needs overlapping one over other:



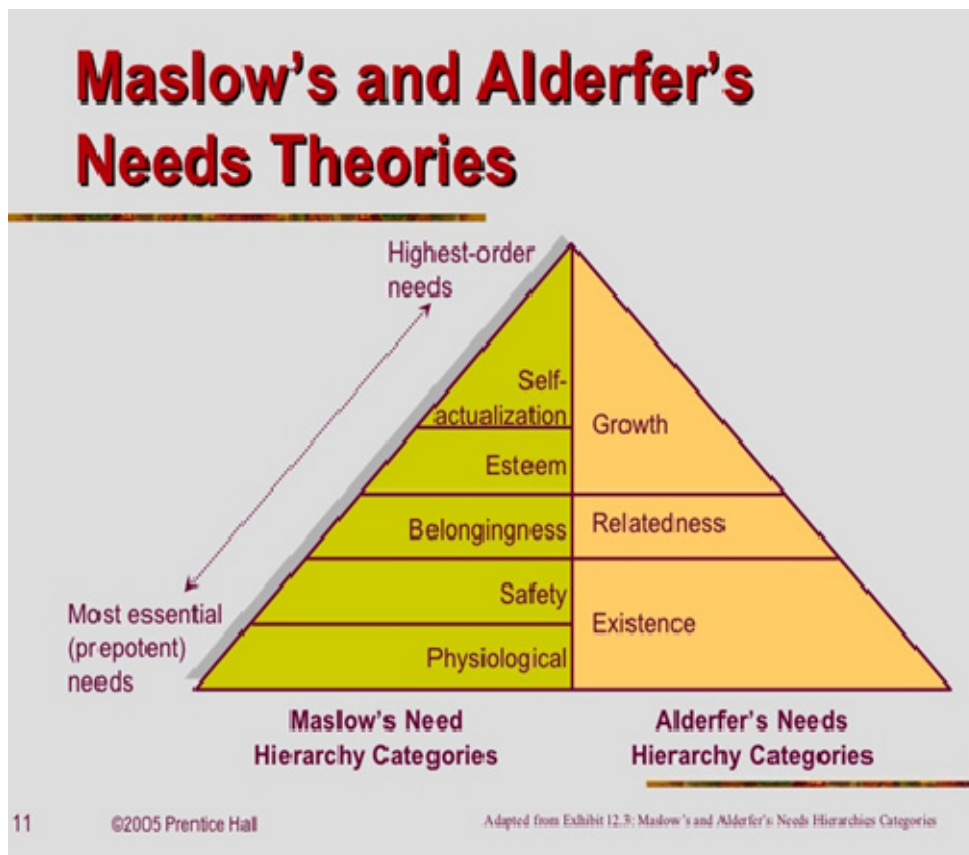
Next to Maslow, there are others who propounded with various Need theories encompassing various human traits and psychological characteristics. In the 1960s, there was David McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory who also came out with need theory which is to with psychological approach whether it is to do with ordinary human being or a creative writer.

McClelland proposed three types of innate motivation that significantly influence our behaviour. In the 1960s, Clayton Alderfer's ERG Theory came out modelling Maslow's theory well reworked into three interrelated needs: existence, relatedness, and growth. In the 1980s, the Fundamental Needs Matrix was espoused by Manfred Max-Neef who distinguishes 9 needs from a multitude of satisfiers which he grouped into 4 categories viz., qualities, things, actions, and settings. The needs of human beings have been put in different way by Simon Hertnon with nine needs starting with existence and ending with philosophical idea about human nature and life:



Source : Simon Hertnon's Nautilus Diagram

Happiness is the state every human wants to be in. It is a concept and there is much difference between pleasure and happiness. It is a state in the mind. A person whose basic need such as food and shelter are not fulfilled, can he or she be happy? This is, of course, an existential question. Kamala Das, according to Simon Hertnon's Nautilus Diagram, is in the 5th level where she wants to feel happy by expressing herself and she needs self-esteem through her literary oeuvre. In *My Story- An Autobiography* and other collection of poems, she attempts to achieve happiness and attain self-actualization. To achieve them, she changes her persona and she metamorphoses into various forms and state of mind changing her perceptions with highly self-contradictory note – be it on love, her husband or religion or human relationship. Here in under one may see the difference between the two theories propounded by Maslow and Alderfer, another psychologist.



Alderfer divides human needs into three broad categories with Existence, Relatedness and Growth – all these components to do basic and higher level of human needs. At this point, what the research scholar points out is that every human being is led by his or her psychological traits and characteristics. Here, Kamala Das, as found in various psychological theories, attempts to achieve self-esteem and self-actualization through various modes including through her confessional approach to reveal her real persona and her odyssey through the endless artistic journey. Finally, she achieves contentment as Maslow and Alderfer espoused in their theories starting with basic needs such as love and sex and then the profound state called self-contentment.

1.26 Conclusion

“Allah told me that in order to be effective, you should have political power” , this is what Kamala Das told when she was asked why she converted to Islam. Kamala Suraiya (in her pre-Islamic days) continues to shock the straight-laced Malayalees. One of India's best-known English poets and short story writers, Kamala Suraiya, who abandoned Hinduism to convert to Islam last December, launched a national political party last week. Christened as the Lok Seva Party, the new political party, she says, emerged from her conviction that social change could be possible in India only through political power. But Suraiya, 68, and with near-blind eyes puts forward another reason that compelled her to embrace the political vocation -- Allah. "Allah inspired me to launch this party," she says. Before embarking on the political mission, Suraiya says she carried out three months of meditation and prayer before Allah. In an exclusive interview with Senior Associate Editor George Iype, Suraiya, clad in a black purdah and her hands adorned with colourful bangles, spells out how her conversion to Islam forced her to take the plunge into political life. When he asked her “What compelled you to launch a political party?”, Kamala Das replied that the degeneration of the present set of political parties is the main reason why I decided to start my own party. We have to give truth some importance in political life. I have given truth a special status in my life. So it pains me when our political parties continue in the most degenerated forms. But what is gladdening is that a number of youngsters came to me with a request to start a political party. These youngsters, most of them college boys and girls, are tired of the falsehood and avarice which politicians display in great abundance these days. I thought it might be a good reason to start a political party. Importantly, she was asked “So you never felt this strength and faith as a Hindu?”, to which she replied that for me, all gods are the same, whether you are a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian or anyone. I believe in the concept of god. For me, god is the

guardian. When she was confronted with another intimidating question “Do you think that these changes taking place in your life are out of your conviction?”, Das candidly replied that “My conviction is growing. Islam has grown on me. In the beginning I was not at all religious. Now I am really religious because of Islam.” When he asked her “Are you happy with your new religious status? Are you happy with your new life as a Muslim?”, Das gave antithetical reply : If happiness is the negation of unhappiness, I am happy as a Muslim. To the question “You had said you were depressed and disappointed as a Hindu all these years. What were the reasons behind this disappointment?”, she replied that :

Kamala Das’s literary writings reproduce external reality in its mental aspect. She employs the presentation of this mental aspect the literary products of kamala das’s are mainly objective on character .but there is a controlled infusion of subject vision in her representation of life that she witnesses around her own self in her period of life. Thus literature of kamala Das’s is helpful in guiding reader to discover their inner strength through self-definition and self-discover. Thus the literature of kamala Das’s awakens in the hearts of all perceptive reader a stronger sense of justice and a more Christian like humanity. In all these respect it has proved itself to be educative instructive and trendsetting. Addressing the controversies surrounding her she once said in an interview with Shobha Warriar:

“[It is] probably because I have some courage to be what I am, and I don’t see my faults as faults – I see them as characteristics; strengths too. Why not, if you realise that you are only a human being?”.

Other than the some limitations faced the research scholar, the whole of journey of investigating and exploring the Das’ work is challenging and rewarding. The new writings have put Das in higher pedestal than earlier. There are more fresh avenues to do more research and reassess her literary works in terms of new approaches and principles such as

Cultural theory and Ecocritical theory. Since most of her works are replete with the place and she is in love with her own place, Kerala , which is in other words known as God's Own Country. Kamala Das' literary works are erotic, sexual, confessional, feministic, psychological but a voice for the Indian women to show the world the suppressed cries and she took upon herself the task of working as a mouthpiece for women's freedom and the psychologically and emotionally oppressed women not in only in India but also to the whole world.