

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE SELECTED STORIES OF
KATHERINE MANSFIELD, ALICE MUNRO AND
KAMALA DAS (MY STORY)**

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Autobiography is the description of an individual's life .It involves self analysis on the part of the writer. A person writes an autobiography to bring out their hidden feelings to the outer world. According to Gerhard Stilz, "autobiography is an elliptic venture where an author attempts to describe and locate one focus (his own self) by coming to terms with the other (the world experienced)"(1995: 164) .Writing Autobiography is indeed a very precious medium in the hands of thinking women. Though countries and cultures are different.The difficulties and obstacles women come across are the same. They describe their inner sufferings in the male centric world. In fact, woman tries to challenge for democracies all over the world to protect their few rights.

Katherine Mansfield is a Newzeland born writer, Kamala Das an Indian and Alice Munro is one of the greatest writers of Canada. These writers challanged the male domination and laid the way for the other women writers to put forth their thoughts and feelings openly and courageously infront of society. As these writers are inspired by their own emotional life experiences their stories and characters have very close similarities and kinship.Though these three writers are from different countries the life experiences they underwent are same and they projected them through their stories.

Katheline Mansfield Beauchamp (Katherine Mansfield) has acquired an international reputation as a writer of short stories, poetry, letters, journals and reviews projecting her own experiences to the characters she has written. Stories like 'DollsHouse', 'Prelude', 'The Stranger' and 'The Garden Party' and so on. Alice Munro's stories 'The Peace of Utrecht' 'Fathers' 'Royal Beatings' depicts her own life relationship with her father. Her Short-story series 'The View from Castle Rock' shows her families relation with historical events and people. The stories revolve around Munro's Scottish family history, taking us back to the 18th century, and are based on journals, letters and research Munro did while visiting the Ettrick Valley where her ancestors lived.

Kamala Das is one of the best-known Indian women writers. Writing in two languages, English and Malayalam, Das has authored many autobiographical works and novels, several well-received collections of poetry in English. She depicts intensely personal experiences in her passage to womanhood and shedding light on the hypocrisies that informed traditional society.The present paper brings forth the life of authors self depiction in their stories.

Katherine Mansfield who lived from 1888 to 1923 is considered to be one of the most remarkable short story writers. Using her life experiences as an inspiration for her stories,

Mansfield sculpted her ideas into wonderful pieces of literary work. The diversity of friends and acquaintances Katherine Mansfield had over her life time, also had a great influence on her career. Her immense love for her country Newzealand and the childhood life made her to portray Newzealand as background for her stories. These stories are considered to be her best works. Ian A Gordon says “Katherine love for her country and the realisation of the greatness occurs only after her migration to England”:

“The longer I live, the more I turn to Newzealand. I thank God I was born in Newzealand. A Young country is a real heritage, though it takes one time to recognize it. But Newzealand is in my very bones.” (1928,ii, p.199)These words Katherine Mansfield shows her admiration for her country.

Katherine’s writings which were filled with her reminiscences of her country arouses readers curiosity in her works and country as well. Her characters and episodes in the stories are portrayal of her real life acquaintances. Her personal memoirs became background settings for her fiction. ‘The Prelude’, ‘The Dolls House’, ‘At the Bay’, ‘Scholar ship’ and many other stories portray her life experiences.

Alice Munro’s short-story cycle ‘The View from Castle Rock’ is based on the authoress’ search for family history in the Scottish area of the Etrick Valley, as well as the events of her personal life, ‘The View from Castle Rock’ have an autobiographical dimension, like many of her other stories—for example, ‘Friend of My Youth,’ ‘Hold Me Fast’, ‘Don’t Let Me Pass’, and ‘Wilder-ness Station,’ stories which also deal with family history and are based on Scottish-Canadian material. Moreover, these stories belong to the area of historical autobiography.

Coral Ann Howells notices that, in these stories, there is a “playful mixture of fact and fiction, an imaginative re-visioning of history” (Howells 1998: 107). The stories are characterized by the transformation of facts into subjective responses to historical events. By tracing down her family history, Munro also writes about a certain part of Scotland, a certain period in Scottish history, and a certain class of peo-ple. It is about southern Scotland and about the religious re-vival of the early 1800s which gave rise to a period of history that Munro calls the Age of Reason in the book, or the Scot-tish Enlightenment..

Kamala Das also describes the same sort of attachment to her home town. She shows a note of nostalgia through her poem ‘The Grandmother's House’ which has the reminiscences of the love that was showered upon her by her grandmother in her good olden days.The autobiographical facts in her stories and poems makes the readers feel that she is really involve in the characters, she portrays her characters with such a realistic approach. Moreover the language that Kamala Das uses, suits well autobiographical voice. Even the imagery, tone, style and syntax combined to produce good poetic effect out of the raw autobiographical details in the poems and stories too.

KamalaDas, Katherine Mansfield and Alice Munro all the three writers talk about their parents and childhood in detail.KamalaDas childhood was emotionally depressed,and neglected .She faced gender and colour discrimination in her early schooling.Her parents were not good to each other. Her father was always busy with his work and her mother always spends time in composing poems in their native tongue. Das childhood is filled with loneliness and neglected from the affection of parents.

Women writers give utmost importance to mother and daughter relationship in their autobiography, Katherine M ansfield depicts her mother character through many of her stories like ‘The Garden party’, ‘Prelude’, ‘At the Bay’ and so on. Alice Munro also talks about her mother in her story ‘The Peace of Utrecht’ and ‘Ottawa valley’ .KamalaDas shows her mother as

an absent figure in her writings. Unlike other women writers Mansfield and Kamala Das projected their grandmother character as the most lovable characters in their stories.

Katherine Mansfield remembers her dead grand mother in a letter “There’s my Grand mother, back in her chair with her pink knitting, there stalks my uncle over the grass. I feel as I write, you are not dead, my darlings. All is remembered. I bow down to you. I efface myself so that you may live again through me in your richness and beauty.” (1959 P 89-90)

Katherine Mansfield frequently portrays her parents in her writing. Two of her best known Newzealand stories ‘Prelude’ and ‘At The Bay’. Mansfield’s Father Harold appears in the guise of the self important Stanley Burnell, while Annie as Linda Burnell is depicted as an indifferent and distant mother. Mansfield’s portrait of her mother as Mrs. Sheridian in Prelude is more sympathetic, but it still emphasis the gulf that she felt existed between her and the rest of the family.

Katheline’s conviction from early childhood, that she was an outsider in her own family initially stemmed from her position as the third of four daughters of parents who longed for a son when her only brother Leslie was finally born in 1894, the family fell into celebrations. These celebrations were beautifully portrayed by Katherine in her story ‘A Birthday’ from the collection in ‘A German Pension’.

‘A Birthday’ is a story of German couple Andres and Anna Binzer, Frau Binzer, Mother of Andreas, all the characters and situations in the story are real life characters in Beauchamps family. The mother of Andreas wakes him up early on a Sunday morning and recounts the pain his wife Anna Binzer undergone that previous night and sends him to fetch Dr. Erb. Anna Binzer who had been in severe labour pains does not want to disturb her husband. It shows Annas love for her husband. He gets ready and goes to fetch the doctor. Dr. Erb immediately attends Anna. Mean while Andreas imagine his wife to be dead in the process of giving birth to their third child. “Fright ful business, frightful business. And, I can’t understand it. It isn’t as though it were her first- it’s her third.”

Dr. Erb comes out and informs him of the birth of a son. In the story Erb is replaced for Dr. Kemp the family doctor of the Beachamps, Andreas and Anna Binzer for Mr and Mrs. Beauchamp, Frau Binzer for the most lovable Mrs. Dyer grandmother of Katherine, the only change in the story is the birth of a boy instead the birth of a girl, who is Katherine originally as their third daughter. Mansfield’s Newzealand stories are simply the characters of her real life. While reading these stories memories of family with change in names of charactes can be traced.

Katherine’s attitude towards her own relative’s friends and her own contry led critics to believe that her stories are “extensions, reflections or memories of personal experiences translated into miniature work of art”.

Alice Munro’s readers are ignorant of her own history in its specifics, they know many of its details simply by having reading her work: her growing up on the edge of the Wingham (Jubilee, Hanratty, Dalgley) father, a some time fox farmer from Huron county stock, mother from the Ottawa valley: her mothers death some time ago from parkinson’s disease after a long decline, her fathers more recently of heart problems. All these directly or indirectly projected in Munro’s stories.

Alice Munro has pointed out that her “first really painful autobiographical story....the first time I wrote a story that tore me up was ‘The Peace of Utrecht’ (DHS) which I didn’t even want to write”. It takes up Munro’s mothers death.

In Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives: A Biography, published in 2005, Robert Thacker stresses that “autobiography is imbedded in Alice Munro’s work, autobi-ography always

resonant with fictional imaginings (‘grafted on from some other reality’), and she can be seen always ‘writing her lives’; the lives she has both lived and imag-ined” (Thacker 2005: 18-19). Similarly, in an interview with Lisa Dickler Awano, Munro herself confirms Thacker’s idea when she says:

“Yes, part of the new book is about my family from mate-rial that I have gleaned from research, and part of it is from my own life and my own experience, butnot al-ways completely autobiographical, completely based on fact. However, these stories are ore nearly autobio- graphical stories than those I have published elsewhere.” (Awano 2006: 5)

‘Working for a Living’ and ‘Fathers’ , are about Munro’s fa-ther.As an adult, her father raised animals, especially silver foxes and mink .In the two narratives, the stories of the protagonist’s father and Munro’s father co-incide. In “Working for a Living,” during the war the busi-ness of the protagonist’s father fails, the way Munro’s fa-ther’s did, but is saved by the mother who manages to sell their furs to American tourists. In the end, they give up the whole enterprise, and the father finds a job in a foundry.

In ‘Fathers,’ the author compares her schoolmates’ fathers —Dahlia Newcombe’s and Frances Wainwright’s fathers—to her own. Dahlia’s Father is a violent man who regularly beats his children and wife. Munro’s father is said to have been very severe, using corporal punishment sometimes but never without a reason. .

The stories ‘The Ticket’ and ‘Home’ present a suc-cession of life stages for the protagonist, with many corre-spondences to Munro’s life. In ‘The Ticket,’ just before her first wedding Munro ponders the marriages of other women in her family and concludes that only aunt Charlie married for love. The same aunt gives Alice a significant amount of money, in case she decides to get out of her marriage. Since marriage at the age of twenty takes the protagonist away to the West Coast, in ‘Home’ she returns to western Ontario ,after ending her first marriage (like Munro in real life), and finds herself unable to relate to the place,since it has changed.

Munro’s stories share the definition of the self- they mainly insists in autobiography as the central aim. She reinvents people’s lives and events into stories.

Autobiography as a genre demands some extra honesty, openness and sincerity. The thread of faith between the reader and the writer is the most important thing. Any life-story if it is written to hide things cannot be called worth reading. Moreover those who write autobiographies believe in the value of life. A person who thinks that life is a co-incidence; that life has no meaning; that life is useless - such a person would never attempt an autobiography. Those who think that life has a message, some purpose - only such persons would attempt autobiography. Kamala Das is one such author who believed in that and boldly described her life experiences in the form of Autobiography. The central part of her autobiography lies in the fact that she was chained in a loveless, torturous, meaningless marriage.

Kamala Das wrote her autobiography in 1996. She had her own compulsions to do this work. As she describes in Preface to the book:

‘*My Story*’ is my autobiography which I began writing during my first serious bout with heart disease. The doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of a sudden death and besides there were all the induced by the drugs given to me by the nurses, I wrote continually, not only to honor my commitment but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets so that I could depart when the time came with a hospital bills to be taken care of... Between short hours of sleep scrubbed out conscience... The serial had begun to appear in the

issues of the journal which flooded the book stalls in Kerala. My relatives were embarrassed. I had disgraced my well-known family by telling my readers that I had fallen in love with a man other than my lawfully wedded husband... This book has cost me many things that I held dear but I do not for moment regret having written it.’

KamalaDas tells us her personal experiences including her neglected childhood, growing up stage, her marriage, her disappointment in love, her extra marital affair to overcome her loneliness and so on. As A.N Dwivedi writes “Her autobiography in prose is more baffling and dazing than her poetry, though both speak about the same person and her woeful situation”(2006:42)

Das the most controversial and celebrated Indian authors, combined in her writings rare honesty and sensitivity, provocation and poignancy. ‘The Kept Woman and Other Stories’ explore the man-woman relationship in all its dimensions. Deprived, depraved, mysterious, mystical and exalted, each character, culled from experience and observation, is an incisive study of love, lust and longing. Which KamalaDas herself craved all the time in her life. ‘Sweet Porridge’ and ‘Unni’ are the stories which are very near to Das heart..Through her autobiography KamalaDas has let her readers look into her sufferings and tortures which has undergone by many women.

‘My Story’ makes an apt study of the deprived life of the women. It is the study of inner psychological feelings of Das as a daughter, a wife, a mother and finally as a victim of men domination.

Conclusion

The sceneriao completely become different when women writes autobiographies then men writing autobiographies.Katherine Mansfield , KamalaDas and Alice Munro though they are far away from countries and different from each other in their culture, they described private, delicate, emotional movements of their own life and emphasized their individual identity to the world through their writings.

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