

# AN INTRODUCTION

## CRITICAL APPRECIATION

M.A.4<sup>th</sup> SEM . ENGLISH

An Introduction which appeared in summer in Calcutta is one of Kamala Das finest poem in the confessional and autobiographical mode. The assertion of feminine identity in a male-dominated world is the central theme of this poem. It reveals with disarming candour various aspects of the poetess life-her girlhood, her heritage, her fondness for English, the beginning of tension in her life, her first sexual humiliation, her rebellion against established conventions and social norms and finally the assertion of her individuality and feminine sensibility. It is one of the best poems ever written by Kamala Das.

The poem begins colloquially with the poetess introducing herself as an innocent girl, entirely ignorant of the ways of the world:

**I don't know politics but it I know the names  
Of those in power and can repeat them like,  
Days of week or names of months beginning with  
Nehru. I am an Indian, very brown, born in  
Malabar, I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one.**

But tensions began as she grew up. First of all, she had to face the language problem. She was well versed with English but she was advised not to use it as it was not her mother tongue. She boldly

resented this encroachment on her freedom of expression and her identity, and continued to write in English because in it she could express her varied emotions with natural grace, and easy. This was the earliest reaction of her identity:

**Don't write in English, they said,  
English is not your mother tongue. Why not leave  
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
Every one of you.**

In the second stage she attained puberty and adolescence. There were remarkable physical changes in her body. She was told about it-“for a grew tall, my limbs/swelled and a two places sprouted hair”. She was married at an early age. Love, for which she earnestly yearned in her adolescence, was de-died to her. Instead of it she had to encounter sexual exploitation and humiliation:

**When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and close the door. He did not beat me  
But my said woman body felt so beaten.**

She was compelled to accept the traditional feminine role.

**Dress in sarees, be girl  
Be wife, they said. Be ambroider, be cook  
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, oh**

**Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit  
On walls or peep in through our lays draped windows,  
Be Amy, be Kamala or better  
Still, be Madhvikutty.**

The poetess ultimately realized that her experience were the experience of every woman. The woman craving for love finds beautiful poetic expressions in the following lines:

**I met a man, loved him, call  
Him not by any name, he is every man  
Who wants a woman just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love.**

An Introduction is noticeable for the brilliant use of language. Simplicity, case and grace characterized the style but when she expresses profound emotions her language assumes felicity of expression, as:

**In him.....the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me.....the oceans tireless  
Waiting  
Not the deaf, blind speech  
Of trees in storm of or of  
Monsoon clouds, or of rain or the**

**In coherent mutterings of the blazing**

**Funeral pyre.**

It is very rhythmical and towards the close becomes incantatory. In it is the poetess identifies herself with every woman seeks love. Prof. K. R. S. Iyenger characterizes their peaces as confessional. And Devindra Kohli remarks about it thus: **An Introduction is not only a candid and witty peace of self-revelation, but a state of her credo, her attitude yo language and experience.** It is a recordation of the poetess urges and aspirations and registers the graph of her growth and consciousness, love and despair and all that she can do with the English language.

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- Dr. Rajani Singh