

**An Introduction
by
Kamala Das**



About :-

'An Introduction' by Kamala Das was published in her first collection, Summary in Calcutta in 1965. The collection focuses on love and the pain that follows betrayal. This particular piece is one of her most well-known. It is confessional in nature in that Das is professing her own deep emotions in regards to the patriarchy controlling her life and the lives of countless suffering women. She played a critical role in the establishment of the Indian feminist movement.



The Poem :-

I don't know politics but 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 Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,
I speak three languages, write in
Two, dream in one.
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? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.

It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't

You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and hears and
Is aware. Not the deaf, blind speech
Of trees in storm or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the
Incoherent mutterings of the blazing
Funeral pyre. I was child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair.
When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the
Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.
The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.
I shrank Pitifully.

Then ... I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho. Don't cry embarrassingly loud when
Jilted in love ...

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. In him . . . the hungry haste
Of rivers, in me . . . the oceans' tireless
Waiting. Who are you, I ask each and everyone,

The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,
Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I
In this world, he is tightly packed like the
Sword in its sheath. It is I who drink lonely
Drinks at twelve, midnight, in hotels of strange towns,
It is I who laugh, it is I who make love
And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying
With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.

BENGALI MEANING

আমি রাজনীতি বুঝি না কিন্তু আমি নামগুলো জানি

যারা ক্ষমতায় থাকে এবং আমি নামগুলি বারবার বলতে পারি

যেমনভাবে আমি বলতে পারি সপ্তাহের দিনের নাম, মাসের নাম, একদম নেহেরু থেকে শুরু করে।

আমি একজন ভারতীয়, আমার গায়ের রং কালো, জন্মেছি মালাবারে

আমি কথা বলতে পারি তিন ভাষায়, লিখতে পারি

দুটি ভাষায় এবং স্বপ্ন দেখি একটি ভাষায়।

"একদম ইংরেজিতে লিখবে না", তারা বলল, "ইংরেজি

তোমার মাতৃভাষা না।" কেন

আমাকে একা থাকতে দিচ্ছ না, সমালোচক, বন্ধু, বেড়াতে আসা খুঁড়তুতো ভাই রা

তোমরা সবাই? কেন আমায় কথা বলতে দিচ্ছ না

যেকোনো ভাষায় যা আমার ভালো লাগে? যে ভাষায় আমি কথা বলি

সেই ভাষাই আমার ভাষা, এটির বিকৃতকরণ, এটির উদ্ভোটতা

সবই আমার শুধু আমার

আমার ভাষা অর্ধেকই ইংরেজি, অর্ধেক ভারতীয়, শুনতে হয়তো মজার, কিন্তু সেই ভাষা সৎ

এই ভাষা আমি যেমন মানুষ তেমনই,
তোমরা বুঝতে পারছ না? এই ভাষা প্রকাশ করে আমার আনন্দ আমার চাওয়া পাওয়া
আমার আশা এবং এই ভাষা আমার কাছে ততটাই প্রয়োজনীয়
যতটা কাকের ডাক কাকের কাছে এবং সিংহের গর্জন সিংহের কাছে প্রয়োজনীয়
আমার ভাষা মানুষের ভাষা, মনের ভাষা যা শুধু
আমার কাছেই আছে এবং অন্যত্র নেই, আমার মন দেখতে পাই শুনতে পায়
এবং সব ব্যাপারে সজাগ। আমার ভাষা বধির অন্ধ ভাষা না
ঝড়ের মধ্যে গাছের ভাষার মতো অথবা বর্ষার মেঘের মতো অথবা বৃষ্টির মত অথবা
অপ্রাসঙ্গিক মন্ত্র পাঠ এর মত
স্বলন্ত চিতার পাশে। আমি ছোট ছিলাম এবং তারা
আমায় বলল আমি বড় হয়ে গেছি, কারণ আমি লম্বা হয়ে গেছি, আমার অঙ্গ গুলি
ফুলে উঠেছে এবং আমার দেহের দুই-একটি জায়গাতে চুলের উদ্ভব ঘটেছে
যখন আমি ভালোবাসা চাইলাম, না বুঝেই কি চাইতে হবে
যখন সে (স্বামী) ১৬ বছরের একজন তরুনীকে (লেখিকা)
নিয়ে গেল তার বেডরুমে এবং দরজা বন্ধ করে দিল, সে আমায় আঘাত করলো না
কিন্তু আমার দুঃখী নারী শরীর খুব আঘাত পেল
আমার বক্ষ এবং গর্ভের ভার আমাকে পিষে দিল
আমি করুণভাবে কঁকড়ে গেলাম
তখন আমি ছেলেদের জামা পড়লাম এবং আমার

ভাইয়ের প্যান্ট পরলাম, চুলগুলো ছোট করে ছাটলাম এবং অপেক্ষা করলাম

আমার নারীসত্তা কে। "শাড়ি পরো, মেয়ে হও

স্ত্রী হও" তারা বলল "সেলাইয়ের কাজ শেখো, রাঁধুনি হও,

চাকরদের সাথে ঝগড়া করো। এতেই তোমাদের মানায়। ওহ

যা বলছি তাই হও" চিৎকার করে বললো বিভেদকারী রা।

"দেওয়ালের ওপর বসবে না অথবা পর্দা ঢাকা জানালা দিয়ে বাইরে তাকাবে না।

অ্যামি হও, অথবা কমলা হও। অথবা ভাল হয়

মাধবী কুড়ির স্ত্রী হও। এখন সময় হয়েছে

একটি নাম, চরিত্র বেছে নেওয়ার। খেলা করার ভান করো না

মানসিক রোগীর মত হয়ো না অথবা

যৌগ আবেদন ময়ী হইও না। চিৎকার করে অস্বস্তিকর ভাবে যে কান্না করো না

যখন তুমি ভালোবাসায় প্রতারিত হবে"

তারপর আমার সাথে পরিচয় হলো একজন পুরুষের, তাকে ভালো বাসলাম

তাকে নাম ধরে ডেকো না। সে প্রতিটি পুরুষের মতো

যে একজন মহিলাকে চায় আমার মত

যে মহিলা শুধু ভালোবাসা চায়, সেই পুরুষটির মধ্যে রয়েছে অসম্ভব যৌন ক্ষুধা

ঠিক যেন নদীর মত, আর আমার মধ্যে রয়েছে সমুদ্রের মতো ক্লান্তিহীন অপেক্ষা করার ধৈর্য

আমি প্রতিটি পুরুষ কে জিজ্ঞাসা করলাম "তুমি কে?"

উত্তর পেলাম "আমি হলাম আমি"। যেকোনো জায়গায়

এবং সর্বত্র আমি দেখি পুরুষদের যারা নিজেকে 'আমি' বলে পরিচয় দেয়

এই পৃথিবীতে প্রতিটি পুরুষ নিজেকে আঁটোসাঁটো ভাবে রক্ষা করে

ঠিক যেমন খাপের মধ্যে তরোয়াল থাকে। প্রতিটি পুরুষ হল সেই 'আমি' যে একা একা মদ্যপান করে

রাত্রি বারোটায় মদ্যপান করে, মাঝরাতে অচেনা শহরের হোটেলের রাত্রি কাটায়

প্রতিটি পুরুষ হল সেই 'আমি' যে জোরে জোরে হাসে, যে মেয়েদের সাথে যৌন সম্পর্ক করে

এবং তারপর তার জন্য লজ্জাবোধ করে এবং এটি হলো সেই পুরুষ যে মারা যায়

গলায় একটা ঢেলা নিয়ে। আমি হলাম পাপী

আবার আমি ই হলাম সাধু। আমি হলাম প্রেমিকা এবং আমি

বিশ্বাস ঘাতিত। আমার এমন কোনো আনন্দ নেই যা তোমার নেই

এমন কোনো যন্ত্রণা নেই যা তোমার নেই। তাই আমিও নিজেকে 'আমি' বলে ডাকতে শুরু করলাম।

Summary of The Poem:-

'An Introduction' by Kamala Das describes the poet's own mental and emotional state as she aged and pushed back against patriarchal society. 'An Introduction' begins with the speaker, Das, stating that she knows all the male leaders of India. Their names are a part of her, a tribute to their overwhelming power. This contrasts significantly with the lack of power she felt growing up and getting married at sixteen. She struggles with her identity and is finally able to step away from the traditional role of wife.

Das describes the way that men are able to move through the world with a solid identity. They are allowed their choices and emotions. In the last lines, she pushes back against this way of life by stating that she feels things that do not belong to the man she loves. She too can be "I."

Themes in An Introduction:-

Das explores powerful themes of feminism/equal rights, freedom, and marriage in 'An Introduction'. This poem is a very clear feminist statement that advocates for free choice for all women. This is in regards to every aspect of

life, but the poet puts a special emphasis on marriage. She compares and contrasts the roles of men and women in society and explains for the reader how her life, the rules she's forced to obey, infringe on her freedom. Readers should be able to ask themselves while moving through the poem how, if at all, the things Das is talking about apply to their own life. If nothing matches up, they might ask themselves why and if some kind of unaddressed or unacknowledged privilege is making their lives better.

Structure and Form of An Introduction :-

'An Introduction' is a sixty line poem that is contained within a single stanza. The lines range from three words up to eleven and do not follow a specific metrical pattern. Das also chose not to use a rhyme scheme. The lines also vary greatly in length and syllable number. This means that the poem is written in free verse. This style of writing allows the poet to explore various structures and make use of more sporadic rhymes. There are several examples of half-rhyme and internal rhyme in 'An Introduction'.

Literary Devices in An Introduction:-

uses techniques such as enjambment, repetition, and anaphora. Repetition and anaphora are seen at the beginning of a number of lines, such as four and five. In this instance, the speaker is giving two conviction filled statements about who she is. This is conveyed through the repetition of the pronoun "I". Later on, repetition is used again to define her language as both "English" and "human". She is a human being, as equal and valuable as any other.

There are also several examples of allusion. She references a specific place and the name of a politician that requires some research in order to understand. Enjambment is another important technique. It can be seen throughout this poem, but one good example is the transition between lines fifty-eight and fifty-nine.

Analysis of An Introduction:-

Lines 1-13

In the first section of 'An Introduction,' the speaker begins by comparing her knowledge of politicians to the days of the week and months of the year. Although she does not have a firm grasp on politics itself, those in power have

remained in her mind. This shows their power to be much greater than their role should allow. The first of these she is able to recall is “Nehru,” who served as India’s first prime minister after the withdrawal of the British.

After these opening lines that set the scene, the speaker moves on to describe her own being. She is “Indian” and she is “very brown.” Lastly, she is from Malabar in southwest India. These are the basics of her life, but of course not everything. She adds that she is able to,

[...]speak three languages, write in

Two, dream in one.

She continues to describe language and the role it plays in her life by saying that she is judged for writing in English. It is not her “mother-tongue.” Whenever she is criticized for how she speaks and writes she feels as if she is alone. There is no one, not her friends or cousins, who back her up. They are critics “Every one.”

She directs the next line at this group, asking them why they care what she speaks. She feels a deep connection to the words she uses and how, through “distortions,” her language can only be defined as her own.

Lines 13-25

In the next thirteen lines of ‘An Introduction,’ the speaker goes on to describe herself as “half English, half Indian.” She sees the humor in this combination and acknowledges that fact as it is “honest.” This seems to be one of the most important parts of her, a desire for authenticity and honesty. Her identity, as seen through her voice, is “human” just as she is human. It should be held under that single defining category and no other.

Das describes the control she has over her voice, whether through speech or text. It can display all of her emotions and her,

[...] mind that sees and hears and

Is aware.

Human speech is to humans as roaring is to lions. It is intelligible, unlike the roaring of a storm or the “mutterings of the blazing fire.” The speaker defines her freedom through the use of her voice. In the next lines, she explains to the reader that there are other circumstances in her life that infringe on that freedom. They are out of her control.

She introduces this section by stating that she only felt older as she grew because she was told of her own physical changes.

Lines 26-38

Her unhappiness is defined in the next section of lines of ‘An Introduction’ and is directly related to a need for freedom. When she was young she “asked for love,” because she didn’t know what else to want. This ended with her marriage at sixteen and the closing of a bedroom door. Although her husband did not beat her, her,

[...] sad woman-body felt so beaten.

This line of An Introduction is interesting as she is placing her own body in one of the categories she rebelled against in the first stanza. It is due to this simplification of a woman as nothing more than a body that led her to marriage at sixteen. She also places blame on her own body for leading her to this place. Her distinctly female parts, “breasts and womb” are a crushing weight on her life. The pressure placed on her by her husband and by her family led to an emotional and mental shrinking. It was a “Pitiful” process. But it ended.

She goes on to state that a change came over her. She decided to put on her “Brother’s trousers” and cut off her hair. The speaker is ridding herself of the female image that has harmed her. Now that she is remaking her identity she is able to say no to the traditions of womanhood. These include fitting in and dressing in “saris.” The “categorizers” might tell her not to,

[...] peep in through our lace-draped windows

But she is not going to listen. She chose to move her life beyond the traditional and therefore expand her presence in the world.

Lines 39-50

In the first two lines of the next section of 'An Introduction,' it becomes clear that the speaker is truly meant to be the poet herself. She wonders at her own identity and marvels over the fact that she can now be,

Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better

Still, be Madhavikutty.

It is by this final name that the poet, Kamala Das, came to be known and is still called. Das added another few reminders on behalf of the "categorizers." She shouldn't "play pretending games" or "cry embarrassingly loud." Her role as a woman is supposed to be meek, quiet, and contained.

She goes on to describe a time in which she met and loved a man. This person is referred to as "man," he is not named. This strips him of some of the agency he is so in control of in the next lines. Additionally, the name is of little importance as he is meant to represent every man in the world who uses women as he pleases.

At one point, at the height of her emotions, she asks the "man" who he is. He replies "it is I." The "I" represents the agency he has in the world. Men make their own decisions and have the ability to use the pronoun in order to get what they want.

Lines 51-60

'An Introduction' begins its conclusion with the speaker acknowledging the constant presence of "I" around her. In the world, she's a part of there are "I" men everywhere she looks. A person of this nature is able to go and "Drink... at twelve" and stay in "hotels of strange towns." As the lines continue the division between the speaker and the "I" is blurred. Eventually, a reader comes to understand that she is trying to come to terms with her own independence and identity as both "saint" and "sinner."

She is trapped between her own need for free life and the world which tries to keep her contained. The final statement is one of protest and resistance. Das

states that she has “Aches” which belong to no one but herself. She too can be “I.”

Short Answer type Questions:-

1. What does the poetess know about Indian politics?

The poetess Kamala Das does not understand politics but she knows the name of every Indian politician beginning with Nehru and she can say those names as easily as the names of days, months.

2. “I am Indian”—Who refers to herself as an Indian? Where was the speaker born?

The poetess Kamala Das refers to herself as Indian.

She was born in Malabar.

3. How many languages did the poetess know to speak, write? What was her native language?

The poetess knew three languages to speak and two languages to write.

Malayalam was her native language.

4. “Don’t write in English”—Who orders and to whom? Why does the speaker say so?

All the critics, friends, and visiting cousins order the poetess not to write in English because English is not her mother-tongue.

5. “Why not leave me alone”—Who says so and to whom? Why does the speaker say so?

The poetess Kamala Das says so to her critics, friends and visiting cousins because they all protest her to write or speak in other languages except her mother-tongue.

6. Which languages are Kamala Das' own language? How does Kamala Das describe her own language?

According to Kamala Das, the languages that she likes to speak, write are her own language that may be incomplete, with distortions, queerness because with those languages she can express her joys, longings.

Those languages are as useful to the poetess as cawing to crows, roaring to the lions.

7. How does the poetess compare her English writings to the trees and clouds?

According to the poetess, her English writings are not incoherent and insignificant like the sound of trees and clouds.

8. "I was a child, and later they
Told me I grew....."—Who is 'I' here? Who are 'they' here? Why do they consider that the referred person has grown up?

Here 'I' refers to the poetess Kamala Das.

Here 'they' refers to the people of society.

They consider that the poetess has grown up because she has become tall and her limbs have swelled and also in one or two places of her body, hair has sprouted.

9. ".....ignored my womanliness"—Who ignored her womanliness? How did she do that? Why did she do that?

Here in the poem “An Introduction”, the poetic persona i.e. the poetess herself wanted to ignore her womanliness.

To ignore her womanliness, she wore her brother’s dresses, cut her hair short.

She did so because she could not endure the pain of being a woman in this male-dominated society.

10. “Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said.....”—Who said this and to whom? When did they say so?

The people of society said this to the poetess Kamala Das.

When to ignore her womanliness, she wore her brother’s dresses, cut her hair short, they said so.

11. What did the categoriser/ society advise the poetess?

The categoriser/ society advised the poetess to dress in saree to look like a girl or someone else’s wife. They also advised her to be a cook, embroiderer or a quarreler.

12. What did the categoriser/ society forbid the poetess?

The categoriser/ society forbade the poetess to sit on walls, peep through window curtains and even to cry loudly.

13. “Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or better
Still be Madhavikutty.”—Explain.

The male-dominated society always underestimates the identity of women in this society. They want that woman should live her life like a dependent woman.

14. What can a man do at midnight?

At midnight, a man can drink wine in a hotel of strange town lonely without anyone's permission.

15. ".....anywhere and
Everywhere I see the one who calls himself I"—Whose confession is this?
Explain.

The poetess Kamala Das says this.

Kamala Das meets so many people in her life and loves many of them. But when she asks them who they are. They answer that they only love themselves, not the poetess. Here a male ego is evident in their answers.

16. "I too call myself I"—Who is 'I' here? Explain.

Here 'I' refers to the poetess Kamala Das herself.

When the poetess seeks love everywhere, she observes that nobody loves her. They only love themselves and express their identity as "I". So, the poetess also decides to call herself 'I'.

17. What type of poem is this?

An Introduction is a confessional autobiographical poem.

Broad Questions:-(5 marks)

Q.No.1

"I was a child, and later they
Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs
Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair"—Explain.

/OR/

"He did not beat me
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten."—Explain.

Answer: In the poem An Introduction, the poetess Kamala Das has presented the pathetic condition of Indian women. Here the feminine poetic persona has been presented as 'I'. That woman was once a child. Though her physical appearance seemed to be adult, her state of mind was like a child and full of innocence. But the male dominated society wanted to get her married quickly because she was growing up. She was not agreeing to get married but in the eye of society that girl had no right to remain unmarried even when she had not crossed her childhood. It shows that the girl had nothing to do anything in the society like education, play etc. except marriage. There nobody gave any importance to her will.

Q.2.

“I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar,
I speak three languages and write in
Two, dream in one.”—Explain.

/OR/

“Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone.
It is half English, half Indian, ”—Explain.

/OR/

Describe the Indianness of the girl mentioned in the poem An Introduction.

Answer: These lines belong to Kamala Das' poem An Introduction. Here at the very beginning of the poem, the poetess has described herself as an Indian. Besides, like most South Indians, her complexion is dark. But she is not ashamed of it. Then she establishes a contradiction between her own will and the will of male-dominated society. At that time society does not allow a girl or a woman to be educated in foreign language like English except her mother tongue. Society even sets the language to be spoken by women. The woman has no right to select her own language. But here the poet has presented an argument over this matter. According to her, if she feels easy to write, speak

in another language like English, no one should raise questions against it because through that language she can express her inner-self, words of mind more freely and beautifully. Through that language she can dream to be an established citizen. So like man, every woman has the right to select her language to speak, dream or write.

Q.no.3

“Dress in sarees, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,

Be a quarreller with servants, Fit in. Oh,

Belong, cried the categorizers. Don't sit

On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.

Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better

Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to

Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.”—Explain.

/OR/

“Don't play pretending games”—Explain.

Answer: These lines have been taken from the poem An Introduction by Kamala Das. Once the poet or a girl described in the poem was forcefully married without her consent even when she had not crossed her childhood. Due to her low age, she could not endure the marriage physically and mentally and soon became great with a baby. She began to hate her womanhood. And to be distinguished and to get rid of rules, order imposed on her, she cut her hair short, and wore her brother's shirt. But the society did not permit her to do all that. Always the male dominated society had underestimated the freedom, will of women. Even they set the dress-code of women. According to them, they have no right to be equal to male as a woman has just born to be someone's daughter or wife. Woman should not go outside to do any work; rather she should be a cook or an embroiderer. Even as if to be a perfect woman, according to the categorizer, a woman should be a well quarreler with servants. Over all the male-governed society did not allow her to be her own identity. They were forced to take the identity or name of their husband. They should not peep through the window lace because she might look at the world outside.

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