

By 08.11.2020
8809169835 [An Introduction] By:- Kamala Das

Kamala Das is one of the members of the poetic trinity of Indo-English poets, the other two being Gopinath Puttappa and Ramanujan. Her poetry is all about herself, about her intensely felt desire for love, for emotional involvement and her failure to achieve such a relationship. She started writing poetry while in school, but before contributing to the Indian poetry in English, she had won fame as a Malayali writer. In 1963, she won the PEN's Asian Poetry Prize. She is bilingual like most other Indian poets writing in English. She wrote both prose and poetry in both English and Malayalam. Her first volume, *Summer in Calcutta*, appeared in 1965, and *The Descendants* in 1967. *The Abd. Playhouse and other Poems*, published in 1972, brought her wide popularity and recognition.

'An Introduction' is one of Kamala's better known lyrics and it is also included in *The Summer in Calcutta*. It voices the poet's quest for identity and fulfilment. True to Kamala Das's confessional mode of poetry, 'An Introduction' expresses the poet's innermost thoughts and feelings. It begins colloquially with the poet introducing herself as an innocent Indian girl.

"I don't know politics but I know the names of these in power, and can - - - dream in one

Here, the self remains the subject. Her Dravidian identity is emphatic. "I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar." It also expresses her outrage against the critics who ask her to write in her mother tongue alone. English too becomes a part of her intellectual and emotional framework. The question of language put to rest, asserting her need to write in English, Kamala moves on to other spheres of human existence.

Then, there comes the puzzling adolescence and pain of growing up as a woman. This is followed by a desire to be even with the male world on its own terms, though the pressure of family and society to conform to the traditional feminine role:

"Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook
Be a quarreller with servants."

And finally, comes the realization that her experiences are the experiences of every woman. She shows a strong feeling to escape in this patriarchal society.

"I wore a shirt and my brother's trousers,
cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness."

However individualistic Kamala Das tries to remain, she is every woman in search for love. There is an unmis-

takable strain of loneliness. The assertion of the self has another side. She is the sinner and the saint, the beloved and the betrayed. She makes love which is accompanied with shame. She, too, calls herself 'I'.

The poem may not be her poetic manifesto, but it tells us much about her views regarding the medium of poetic expression. Anisur Rehman opines: "An Introduction offers neither an excuse for writing nor a poetic manifesto." It is related to the growth of her growth and consciousness, love and despair, and all that she can do with the English language. The full impact of the line — "I speak three languages, write in Two, dream in one"

It is not quite clear, though she is bilingual. She transmutes her 'joys', 'longings' and 'hopes' into the sensitive and plastic mould of English, 'The speech of mind'. What she says is more important than the medium in which she says. She puts it herself "The language one employs is not important. What is important is the thought contained by the words." With regard to the feminine sensibility, Satya Dev Jaggi also affirms that, "She is intensely conscious of herself as a woman."

Thus, Kamala is a great and original poet with a distinctive poetic personality of her own.