

# An Introduction by Kamala Das



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## Summary

### Table of Contents



1. [Summary](#)
2. [An Introduction by Kamala Das | Analysis](#)
  1. [Her view on politics](#)
  2. [Identity](#)
  3. [Advocacy of English Language](#)
  4. [Her Miserable Married Life](#)
  5. [Rejection of patriarchy- Aspect of Feminism](#)
  6. [The imposition of societal norms](#)
  7. [Her Struggle to obtain “I”](#)
  8. [Gender Biasness](#)
  9. [Identifying herself with the ‘I’](#)
3. [The theme of An Introduction by Kamala Das.](#)
4. [Structure of An Introduction](#)
5. [Conclusion | An Introduction](#)
6. [Works cited](#)

“An Introduction” by Kamala Das is an autobiographical and confessional poem that voices out her concern about patriarchy, starting from politics to sexual politics.

“An Introduction” by Kamala Das encapsulates her personality as it expresses some incidents of her life, her rejection of patriarchal norms, and her rebellion against the gender role as well. This revolt ends with the assertion of her identity by recognizing herself with ‘I’.



# An Introduction by Kamala Das

## | Analysis

### Her view on politics

Kamala Das starts with a statement that the poet doesn't know politics nevertheless she is well aware of the politicians who are ruling the country. The names of the politicians, beginning with Nehru, are so few that she can count them as the days of the week or the names of the months. This shows that **politics and power in the nation were only in few hands at her time.** Politics in the nation is a field of male dominance and there is no space for women to possess.

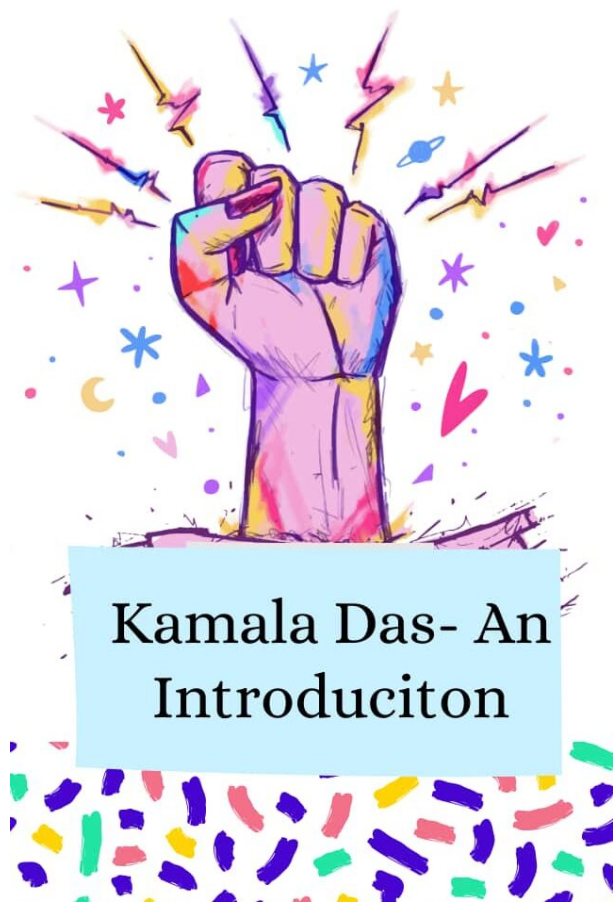
### Identity

The poet Kamala Das proudly announces **her identity as an Indian; she is brown, born in Malabar, Kerala.** She speaks three languages, she is a bilingual writer who writes both in her mother tongue, Malayalam, and in English as well and she sees her dreams only in one. She is possibly trying to be boastful about her competence in academics. In a way, she is proving that she is no lesser than a man.

### Advocacy of English Language

However regarding her choice of writing in English has caught the attention of critics, friends, cousins; they oppose her choice of writing in English and suggest her not to write in English as English is not her mother-tongue, it is a colonial language. This shows the concern of many Indians who do not want to accept the colonial language.

The poet wants them to stay away from her and let her speak an language she wants. She defies their



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argument by arguing that **language is common property**. It might be queer and distorted but when she uses the language, it becomes her.

**Her advocacy of using English supports the view of many post-colonial writers and critics** who think that there is a need to adapt the English language to serve the purpose of Indian writers in English. From a postcolonial standpoint, she can adopt the language of colonizer and can twist the language by adding the native phrases and terms and make it totally a new language, that is “**half English, half/ Indian,**” (177).

In this context, **Elleke Boehmer** finds in Kamala Das is echoing the same spirit what R.K. Narayan called “a swadeshi language”. This process of transforming is what Salman Rushdie terms “**chutnification**”. This language sounds funny yet it is her honest expression. It is as human as she is human. The queerness and distortions could mean local idioms and cultural referents to which English is adapted.

Furthermore, **Kamala Das says that the language she speaks becomes her identity since it expresses her joys, yearnings, and hopes**. It is an indispensable part of her expression as “cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions,” (177) She adds that the language she uses is a human speech which can be understood by the mind and it is not strange unlike the blind speech of trees in the storm or monsoon clouds or rain or incoherent muttering of the blazing Funeral Pyre.

## HER MISERABLE MARRIED LIFE

Kamala Das afterward changes our focus from language to her personal life. As she physically grew, her parents told her she has grown up. When she asked for love, she got nothing but pain. Though she reached puberty at the time of her marriage however she was not prepared for her sexual encounter. Her miserable marriage life made her traumatized, she says that she was not beaten by her husband yet her body felt to be beaten.

Kamala Das also adds “*The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.*” (177) At an early age, Kamala Das was married. In her autobiography *My Story* Kamala Das reveals that the anguished persona of her poetry is evidently derived from a traumatic frustration in love, and marriage, finally urges her to “run from one/ Gossamer love to another,’ sadly realizing that “Love became a swivel-door/When one went out, another came in.” (Naik 219)

Kamala Das’s autobiographical element, her miserable married life, is hinted in the previous quotation. The word ‘beaten’ symbolizes the pain she had in her sexual life. Her husband uses her as an object to quench his thirst for lust but never loved her. As a result, it devastated her badly. From this experience, we come to know that the poet had no good experience in her married life.

## Rejection of patriarchy- Aspect of Feminism

Because of Das’s painful experiences in marriage, she was tired of her body and womanliness. Therefore in a fit of frustration and protest, she defies the gender roles set by patriarchy. She wore a shirt and her brother’s trousers and cut her hair short.

## The imposition of societal norms

Upon seeing this, the categorizers asked her to dress in *sarees* and to choose her role: a girl, wife, embroiderer, cook but she could never be herself and live life the way she wants. The categorizers refer to those people who categorize gender roles and follow them religiously. According to those

categorize gender roles and follow them religiously. According to those categorizers, women should accept the role that is designed for her in society.

Being a woman, they thought it is quintessential for her to choose a role in society.

Kamala Das was asked not to sit on walls as it was against the role, or peep in through their lace-draped windows. She was asked not to pretend at schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a mental disorder in which the person suffers from delusions and withdraws him/herself from reality. By acting as a male, she is not following the role of the female; she seems for them someone who has lost connection with reality. They even asked her not to cry out when she is abandoned suddenly in love.

## **Her Struggle to obtain “I”**

However, in between distress, she met a man whom she loved. She does not call him by any definite name, for her the man is everyman. He is like every man who is in need of a woman to quench the thirst of lust as every woman seeks love from a man. When she asks each man about their identity, the answer is ‘I’. It is the ‘I’ that is found in men. The ‘I’ or the supreme male ego is stuck to a male personality like “sword in its sheath”. Here she uses simile, just like a sword is always affixed to its sheath, in the same manner, the ‘I’ and male personality are always bound together.

## **Gender Biasness**

It projects the power politics of the patriarchal society. It is because of ‘I’ that man has got the freedom to do anything he likes. He can drink at midnight at strange hotels in unfamiliar towns. It is because of ‘I’ he can laugh the way he wants and quenches his lust. However, after that, he feels ashamed at the thought of losing his willpower in front of a woman. This is gender bias.

## **Identifying herself with the ‘I’**

Towards the end of “An Introduction”, there we see a reversal of role as she declares

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. (178)

(Das 178)

She identifies herself with the 'I'. She is also sinner and saint; she has done many virtuous things and committed many vices as well just like everyone else. She loved and had a painful experience of betrayal. Since there is no difference between her and man in terms of joys and sorrows, and experience so she too declares herself as 'I'. This is how at the end of the poem the poet asserts her identity in the male-dominated society.

## The theme of *An Introduction* by Kamala Das.

Kamala Das is an autobiographical and confessional poet. Autobiographical and confessional elements are common and striking features of Das's poetry. Confessional poetry is a type of poetry in which the poet deals with the facts and intimate mental and physical experiences of life. The theme of *An Introduction* by Kamala Das is her quest for identity in a male-dominated society. *An Introduction* by Kamala Das is based on her experiences as a woman in patriarchal society.

## Structure of *An Introduction*

The poem "An Introduction" has irregular rhyme; it does not follow any specific pattern. However, Kamala Das uses literary devices like enjambment. Ellipsis is excluding some parts of a sentence by using three dots. Kamala Das often uses ellipsis in her poetry. In "An Introduction" we see the use of ellipsis in – "Then ... I wore a shirt and my/ Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored/ My womanliness." (177-178)

Enjambment on the other hand is a continuation of line even after the line break. They are also called run-on lines. For instance,

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. (177)

An Introduction

## Conclusion | An Introduction

One of the common features of Das's poetry is the honest expression of her privacy. This honest expression of Das's personal life is what Mary Erulkar called "the bitter service of womanhood" (Naik 218). But a closer observation it becomes clear that it is not a "Nudity on sheets of weeklies," nor a wanton display of 'thigh and sighs', nor yet merely a case of 'from bed to verse', Kamala Das's persona is no nymphomaniac; she is simply 'every woman who seeks love'; she is 'the beloved and the betrayed' (Naik 218). However, she remains the eternal Eve who proudly celebrates her essential femininity.

**Have you read-** [My Grandmother's House by Kamala Das](#)

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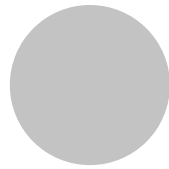
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