

‘An Introduction’: Brief Analysis

‘An Introduction’ is one of the most famous poems of Kamala Das first appeared in her first collection, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). It is a poem of self-assertion written in Das’ trademark confessional style. It relates the poet’s various conflicts at different phases of her life which eventually lead to the poet’s coming into her own.

The poem begins with the poet’s referring to dominant peoples, mostly politicians, she knows of and can count their names. This, however, is in contrast with the lack of power she feels when she gets married at a very young age. She feels beaten and crushed carrying the burden of “womb and breasts”.

With a preliminary introduction of herself as ‘very brown’ and ‘born in Malabar’, she writes about how not only people but relatives and family also criticise her writings and for her English. She bluntly asks everyone to leave her alone and her language is hers only with all its queerness and distortions. She asserts that whatever she writes conveys her deep emotions, her joys, her longings and her writing is as innate to her as cawing to crows and roaring to lions.

The patriarchal pressures crush her so much that she decides to relinquish the standards of femininity set by society. She exposes the face of patriarchy which always expects of women to do its bidding and remain subservient all the times.

She writes:

Dress in sarees, be girl

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

Be a quarellor with servants. Fit in. Oh,

Belong, cried the categorisers. Don’t sit

On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows
Be Amy, Madhavikutty. It is time to
Choose a name, a role. Don't play pretending games.
Don't play at schizophrenia or be a
Nympho.

The poet also describes her love experience with a man who is not named because he is 'every man'. At one point, at the height of her emotions, she asks the 'man' who he is. He replies, "it is I". The 'I' represent the agency he has in the world. Men make their own decisions and have the ability to use the pronoun 'I' in order to get what they want.

This realisation of 'I' comes to the poet eventually when she finally concludes by saying:

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.

The poem is written in free verse as lines vary greatly in length and syllables without any rhyme and rhythm. However, at times, the poet has employed enjambment, repetition and anaphora.

The poem is remarkable for its poignant depiction of how a woman feels lesser in the patriarchal society which constrains and dictates her every move. Nevertheless, the poet's conflicts give way to her self assertion, which comes after breaking free from the diktat of society.

