

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

Kamala Das

*KAMALA DAS (b. March 31, 1934), poet and short story writer, has earned a respectable place in both English and Malayalam literature. Her autobiography, published in 1976, created quite a stir. In 1984, she was short listed for the Nobel Prize for literature. Her important volumes of verse in English include **Summer in Kolkata** (1963), **Sirens** (1964), **The Descendents** (1967), **The Old Playhouse and other Poems** (1973), **The Anamatal Poems** (1985), **Only Saint Knows How to Sing** (1996), and **Yes Allah** (2001). Kamala Das's poetry is primarily autobiographical and her theme is love of a lonely heart – love with never ending passion, lust, greed and hunger that never satiate. She is known for sexual adventures in her writings: for her, love hardly ever goes beyond sex and lust – which even reaches the point of nausea, and is reborn again and again with new vigour. Kamala Das reveals a commendable mastery of phrase and control over rhythm. The words are often painted and the rhythm is marvellously, almost feverously, alive.*



A. Work in small groups and discuss the following:

- 1. Do you enjoy the company of your grandparents? What do they do for you? Which act of theirs do you like most?**
- 2. Don't you think that old people should be respected?**
- 3. Big cities lack human warmth and love. Do you agree?**

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

There is a house now far away where once
I received love. That woman died,
The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved

Among books I was then too young
To read, and, my blood turned cold like the moon.
How often I think of going
There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or
Just listen to the frozen air,
Or in wild despair, pick an armful of
Darkness to bring it here to lie
Behind my bedroom's door like a brooding
Dog ... you cannot believe, darling
Can you, that I lived in such a house and
Was proud, and loved ... I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers' doors to
Receive love, at least in small change?



B. 1. Read the following sentences and write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:

- The woman of the house is alive.
- The snakes were seen in the house.
- The speaker read the books with great interest.
- The speaker wished to peep through the window.

B. 2. Answer the following questions briefly:

- Who is 'I' in the second line of the poem?
- Where did the speaker once receive love?
- Why did the house go into silence?
- Why was the speaker unable to read the books?
- Why did the speaker often wish to go to that house?
- Why was the speaker proud of living in that house?
- Why does the speaker say that she has lost her way?
- Is the speaker satisfied with her present life? If not, why?

GLOSSARY AND NOTES

peer (v): observe closely, carefully or with attention

wild (adj): strong feelings, untamed

brooding (adj): contemplative, threatening

despair(n): anguish, hopelessness

C. 1. LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. How does the speaker describe the condition of her grandmother's house? Does it resemble to the house of any of your acquaintance?
2. What type of love or relation do you find between the grandmother and the speaker?
3. What changes have taken place since the speaker's grandmother died?
4. Point out the similes in the poem.

C. 2. GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following in **groups** or **pairs**:

1. Modern metropolis is a jungle of concrete.
2. Love thy neighbour as thyself

C. 3. COMPOSITION

- a. Write a letter describing your neighbours to your friend in Delhi. Do not exceed 150 words.
- b. Write the summary of the poem in about 150 words.

D. WORD STUDY

D.1. Dictionary Use

Ex. 1. Correct the spelling of the following words:

D.2. Word-formation

Read the following lines from the poem carefully:

D.3. Word-meaning

Ex 1. Read the poem carefully to find out where the following phrases have been used.

E. GRAMMAR

Ex. 1. Fill in the blanks, using the appropriate prepositions from the list given below

into to of in at through among

- i. Grandmother threw the letter _____ fire.
- ii. My grandmother's house is _____ the hills.
- iii. Ramesh died _____ an accident.
- iv. Come _____ nine in the evening.
- v. The mathematics book is kept _____ the piles of computer books.
- vi. The grandmother pushed her way _____ the crowd.
- vii. The grandmother is going _____ meet the grandfather.

viii. The Ganga flows _____ Patna.

ix. Prabhu is cleared _____ all blames

F. ACTIVITIES

Ex.1. You expect your grandparents to do a lot of things for you. Do you think they also expect something from you? Talk to your grandparents/ grand-parents of your friends to know what they expect of you.

Ex.2. Read Premchand's short story 'Eidgah' and write a short play in English having three scenes:

- Hamid and his grandmother at home in the beginning
- Hamid's experience at the fair with his friends
- Hamid's present of a pair of tongs to his grandmother

