

**PART – II ENGLISH (B.A, B.SC, B.COM, B.COM (CA))**

**SUBJECT NAME: ENGLISH FOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS-II**

**MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE**

**- KAMALA DAS**

**Mr. L.KANNAN**

# My Grandmother's House





## About the Author:

(born; 31<sup>st</sup> March 1934 – 31 May 2009)

- Also Known by her one – time pen Name Madhavikutty and Kamala Das.
- Was an Indian English poet and literature and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from India.
- She spent her childhood between Calcutta, where her father was employed as a senior officer in the Walford Transport Company that sold Bentley and Rolls Royce automobiles, and the Nalappatt ancestral home in Punnayurkulum.

## Awards:

- Nominated and shortlisted for Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984.
- Award of Asian PEN anthology - 1964
- Kerala Sahitya Academy Award – 1969
- Sahitya Academy Award - 1985



## My Grandmother's House

- Kamala Das

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 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?

## Background of the Poem:

- **My Grandmother's House by Kamala Das.** The poem, **My Grandmother's House**, first appeared in **Kamala Das's** first anthology of verse titled **Summer Time in Calcutta (1965)**. It is also an autobiographical poem in which the poet's longing for her parental **house** in Malabar is movingly described.

## Theme of the Poem:

- The purest form of love is when two people accept each other for who they are and appreciate the flaws in the other. Love is when two people enhance each other's strengths and minimise the weaknesses just like Kamala Das and her grandmother did. The imagery in the poem is personal and brings out the importance of unconditional love from the one that she loves.
- The imagery in the poem is personal and brings out the importance of unconditional love from the one that she loves. It is the memory of the poet's happy childhood days, when her grandmother showered her with love and affection in her ancestral home. She received love from her grandmother without giving anything in return.
- It is the type of love which has no bounds and is unchanging. However, the love that she received vanished along with her grandmother's last breath.



- Now she is married and the love between Kamala Das and her husband is far from what one would call true love. Apart from the fact that she receives no love after her marriage, the poet also tries to convey the issue of male dominance in society.
- She is subjected to much humiliation, oppression and alienation by her brutal husband. Kamala Das believes that she, like other women, failed in receiving love from her husband and considers marriage to be a physical union rather than a mental connection.
- Kamala Das very beautifully articulates in her poem the need for love by comparing her relationship with her grandmother to her relationship with her husband. All of us have an intense desire to be loved and nurtured, which is considered to be one of the most basic and fundamental needs. Kamala Das is deprived of this love to such an extent that she 'begs strangers' to give her love 'at least in small change'.

## Summary of the Poem:

- “My Grandmother’s House” is a constituent poem of Kamala Das’s maiden publication *summer in Calcutta*. Though short, the poem wraps within itself an intriguing sense of nostalgia and up rootedness. In her eternal quest for love in such a ‘loveless’ world, the poet remembers her grandmother which surfaces some emotions long forgotten and buried within her-- an ironical expression of her past which is a tragic contrast to her present situation. It is a forcefully moving poem fraught with nostalgia and anguish.

- The poet says that there is a house, her grandmother's home, far away from where she currently resides, where she "*received love*". Her grandmother's home was a place she felt secure and was loved by all. After the death of her grandmother, the poet says that even the House was filled with grief, and accepted the seclusion with resignation.
- Only dead silence haunted over the House, feeling of desolation wandering throughout. She recollects though she couldn't read books at that time, yet she had a feeling of snakes moving among them-- a feeling of deadness, horror and repulsion, and this feeling made her blood go cold and turn her face pale like the moon. She often thinks of going back to that Old House, just to peek through the "*blind eyes of the windows*" which have been dead-shut for years, or just to listen to the "*frozen*" air.
- The poet also shows the ironical contrast between her past and present and says that her present has been so tormenting that even the Darkness of the House that is bathed in Death does not horrify her anymore and it is a rather comforting companion for her in the present state of trials.
- The poet says that she would gladly ("*in wild despair*") pick up a handful of Darkness from the House and bring it back to her home to "*lie behind my bedroom door*" so that the memories of the Old House and its comforting darkness, a rather ironical expression, might fill assurance and happiness in her present life.
- She wraps up the poem saying that it is hard for one to believe that she once lived in such a house and was so *loved* by all and lived her life with pride. That her world was once filled with happiness is a sharp contrast to her present situation where she is completely devoid of love and pride.
- She says that in her desperate quest for love, she has lost her way; since she didn't receive any feelings of love from the people whom she called her own, she
- Now has to knock "*at strangers' doors*" and beg them for love, if not in substantial amounts, then at least in small change i.e. in little measure at least.



- The poet has intensified the emotions of nostalgia and anguish by presenting a contrast between her childhood and her grown-up stages. The fullness of the distant and absence and the emptiness of the near and the present give the poem its poignancy.
- The images of “*snakes moving among books*”, blood turning “*cold like the moon*”, “*blind eyes of window*”, “*frozen air*” evoke a sense of death and despair. The house itself becomes a symbol - an Edenic world, a cradle of love and joy. The escape, the poetic retreat, is in fact, the poet’s own manner of suggesting the hopelessness of her present situation. Her yearning for the house is a symbolic retreat to a world of innocence, purity and simplicity.
- Both the poets had great attachment with their **grandmothers**. In their company, the poets feel good and affectionate. Many poems deal with memory of Grandmother such as “**My Grandmother's House**” of **Kamala Das** and 'Out Grandmother' of Maya Angelou. Both poets have been the victims of exploitation.

**Thank You**