

Responding to the Poem

1. What makes the depiction of a crumbling village house so authentic in the poem? Is this a common feature of most village houses in the context of rapid urbanisation? Is the poet speaking from actual experience?

Answer. The poet Kamala Das constructs the poem splendidly with strongly connective words. Her poem, Blood, connects with its readers at varied levels. The poem is about a little girl with a beautiful heart and tells us how the fast-moving world around her transformed her into a grown-up butterfly from the cocoon stage. The poet Kamala Das is one of the greatest confessional poets. She connects readers through her poems by using her own experiences. Today's generation deals with modernisation and urbanisation as it is the unsaid demand of today's civilisation. Villages consisting of old houses portray India's heritage and rich culture, which has a sentimental connection to the town's people. But to survive in today's world, one has to accept the drastic changes occurring in our day-to-day life.

2. What aspects of Indian society and history get highlighted in the poem?

Answer. The poet Kamala Das is a significant literary personality who writes on the sensitive issues of society, the rank of women and history. This poem mainly depicts various aspects of women of different ages and highlights the feminine point of view. It also reflects various elements of Indian society and history. The poet emphasises the point that one woman can easily understand another woman and connect with her personally as well. So, the poet Kamala Das, unlike her brother, could understand her grandmother so much.

The great-grandmother of Kamala Das, was once adorned with jewels, smeared sandal paste (for perfume) and oils and used to ride an elephant. Her youthful days are suddenly lost after the death of her husband within a year of their marriage. The status of a woman in society reduces after her husband's soul departs. Nevertheless, their 300-year-old house has got a long-lasting eternal connection with their great-grandmother. With clear insight, the poet highlights all these aspects of Indian society and history in the poem.

3. Does the poem bring out the contrast between tradition and modernity? Illustrate your answer with examples from the poem.

Answer. The poet gracefully outlines a contrast between tradition and modernity. Tradition refers to the ancient culture, beliefs and customs that transfer to us through our ancestors. Modernity refers to a new lifestyle. The poem also depicts how the poet's great-grandmother had pride over her blood, which she carries to her grave. The connection between the 300-year-old house and her grandmother is very pure and old. In the poem, the poet recounts how her great-grandmother is attached to her husband and dies after that. For instance, consider the lines from the poem – "God is her only feast; worldly pleasures become mere condiments to her afterwards". The women in the olden days were deeply connected to their husbands and believed their life to end after their husband's death, which is antithetical to present life as life needs to move on and not hold back with grief or sorrow.

Likewise, several examples illustrate the contrast between tradition and modernity.

4. While the poet respected her grandmother's sentiments of royal grandeur, we can also see that she revolts against it. Identify the lines which bring this out.

Answer. The poet, Kamala Das, had massive respect towards her grandmother, whom she regarded as her inspiration. In the poem, the poet emphasises the struggles the women are going through in their lives. The poet considers her grandmother as a role model, inherits all the morals, and learns how to lead life. The poet also learnt how to love and serve the needy from her grandmother. The poet could sense the connection her grandmother had with the 300-year-old house; she made a firm decision to save the ancestral home. However, soon reality strikes her, and she realises that she can't protect the decaying property, which was of great value to her grandmother. The poet realised earning money was not easy at all and instead decided

to sell the property as it would make more money which would benefit her and her family. The lines: “I set forth again..... Mouth of Arabian Sea.” shows respect to her grandmother, and at the same time, she feels guilty for not keeping up her promise of saving the property.

5. Which lines reveal the poet’s criticism of class distinctions?

Answer. The lines that reveal the poet’s criticism of class distinction are given below:

“A blood thin and clear and fine

While in the veins of the always poor

And in the veins of the new-rich men

Flowed a blood thick as gruel

And muddy as a ditch.”

In the above lines, the poet distinguishes between the rich and the poor. The poet says that the blood of the poor is more transparent and clearer, filled with pure love for others without being greedy and without having selfish motives. However, on the other hand, the blood of the rich is self-centred in nature, implying love and affection towards materialistic aspects more than humans. Therefore, there’s no value in relationships, feels the poet.

6. Is it ‘selfishness’ and ‘callousness’ that makes the poet break her childhood promise to her grandmother of renovating the house? Why does she do nothing about rebuilding the house?

Answer. The poet could feel the pain and grief her grandmother faced. So, the poet decides to buy the ancestral property in memory of her grandmother, consisting of many memories attached to it. But, soon, reality strikes her hard. She realises that earning money is not easy in today’s generation. Therefore, it is foolish to save the dead property with the old house breaking down, white ants climbing, and rats running fearlessly. Nevertheless, she feels guilty for not keeping the promise given to her grandmother to protect the house.

7. What do you understand of the conflict in the poet’s conscience?

Answer. This poem briefs about a little girl’s heart and how the environment moulded her into an adult with the passing of time. The poet Kamala Das shares her insights through this poem. The poet observes nature and tries to put it in her visions as she plays with her brother. At the same time, she connects to her 86-year-old grandmother and cherishes all the memories she had with her, the promise she made to hold on to the ancestral property and never to let go of it. But gradually, she realises that, in reality, in today’s world, earning money is not easy, and she feels guilty for breaking the promise she made. Hence, we should lead a practical life; we cannot fulfil fantasies in today’s world. So, the bitter reality should always be taken into consideration while moving forward in life.

Language Study

Comment on the changes in poetic expression in English from the time of Donne to that of Kamala Das with reference to

- prosodic features (rhyme, rhythm and metre)
- vocabulary
- language
- themes

Answer.

- Prosodic features – During the time of Donne, the poems had a set pattern and were formal ones. Used rhyming words following a specified pattern.

The variation of line length and the meter allows Donne to achieve particular effects, but Kamala Das hasn't used any such poetic device.

- Vocabulary- Donne's usage of vocabulary was very formal, with less description and more suggestions, whereas Kamala Das used words that are elaborate and descriptive.

- Language- Donne used language in the poem, which was full of passion and spoke of his mode and mind. Language usage underwent modifications with the passage of time, and Kamala Das used language understood by laymen easily. The words are those used in general language.

- Themes- Donne's poems used to have an idea and were not based on music or imagination. The theme of the poem used to be fantasy and how things should be. Kamala Das's poems had themes depicting social discrimination, the weariness of solitude and the grandeur prevailing in society. Her lyrics portray the condition of women in society.

