

"A Request"

by Kamala Das

B. A. (Hons.) Part III

Paper VII

Unit I

"A Request" by Kamala Das is included in the collection The Descendants (1967). The title of the poem is ironical as the poem is nothing about a request but a series of commands forcefully asserted. The poem runs in the form of a will where the poet is directing that her remains should not be thrown away but piled up for the world to see the ultimate end of life.

The poem opens abruptly with "When I die" suggesting that either the poet is expecting death anytime soon or preparing for it in advance. It is strange that Kamala Das who wrote extensively about the desires and pains of women in both prose and poetry would discard the body as "meat and bones" after death. It seems she is trying to express the death-in-life existence that women are doomed to in a patriarchal society where being weighed down by the expectations of a family and society at large, a woman cannot afford the luxury of bodily pleasures. Hence life and death bear little contrast for womankind.

Failing to bring any substantial change in the attitude and mindset of the society despite writing about the confinement, commodification and pains of women with the zeal of a revolutionary, she wants her corpse to continue with what she has not been able to finish in her life. She wants her meat and bones to tell the society conditioned and seeped

in patriarchy to "by their smell" to acknowledge the wrongs done to women. The stinking smell of the rotting bones and meat becomes a powerful metaphor for the condition of women in the society who are expected to forsake and sacrifice ~~whatever~~ ^{every} little happiness their existence could provide in the name of supporting life as mothers and providing love and care as wives.

Women are thus confined to their gendered roles bearing the burden of expectations throughout their lives unaware of the passage of time, meeting the ultimate end without a whiff of true existence as a human being.

End