

# KAMALA DAS'S IDENTITY OF LANGUAGE IN "AN INTRODUCTION": A STUDY ON HOMI K. BHABHA'S CONCEPT

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## ABSTRACT

*Kamala Das (1934-2009) is one of the pioneering Indian writers who have established the original Indian identity in English literature. Apart from being a poetess of confessional mode, she is a prominent exponent of Post-colonial studies. She is very frank and faithful to her readers while expressing the true condition of patriarchal Indian society. Throughout her poetic career she advocated for liberty both in individual and social level. She disliked of carrying the burden of British customs in Indian literature and common life. In this sense she attempted to write in 'independent Indian English' that is free from colonial bondage. Her dealing of English is not a mere mimicry, but a resistance against blind following. In this regard her best poem is "An Introduction" published in the collection of "Summer in Calcutta" (1965). Post colonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha highly discussed this mimetic situation of colonized and newly independent people. The intention of this article is to evaluate the postcolonial position of Das depend on Bhabha's concept of mimicry.*

## Keywords:

Homi K. Bhabha, Professor of Harvard University is an outstanding scholar of Post-colonial studies who popularized the theory of 'Mimicry' in his path breaking text "Of Mimicry of Man : The Ambivalence of Colonial discourse". This is a complex concept that deals with the relationship between 'orient' and 'occident'. It's the imitation of the 'superior' colonizers by their 'native' colonized people. Generally this conflict between 'self' and 'other' reveals the racial, cultural, linguistic inferiority of native men. So following the racial white superiors is the chief concern of those people. Even after gaining independence this tendency of those people remains. It's the negative side of mimicry that shows the hegemonic power of First and Second World upon the Third World. Main intention of colonizers behind provoking mimicry was to have a group of blind followers. Bhabha said, "*colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*" Here the word 'not quite' helps the colonizers to locate the other as a difference and the binary relation between master and slave. It is the problem, the 'ambivalence' of mimic men that they neither fully represent their native custom nor their foreign masters. This situation is called 'in between'.

"An Introduction" begins with history and memory. In the very beginning of the poem Kamala Das informs the readers that though she is unaware about politics she can tell the names of popular political leaders like Nehru just like one can tell the names of day of week. Thus she mocks the socio-political leaders of that time who did not allow the women to be well acquainted with politics. Even a post colonial writer like Kamala Das is not acknowledged with politics. Actually the British colonizers also wished the ignorance of native people about socio-political issue. Das recalled the name of Nehru, first Prime Minister of India instead of any British leader that is a slight ignore of them. A true Post-colonialist, Das is rebellious against the western concept of 'orient' or otherness. She believes in individual identity of every human being. So significantly instead of introducing herself with reference of her family or relatives she reveals her identity as an Indian. It shows her concept of liberty whereas she is not ashamed to be an brown Indian ("Other"). She takes pride in her native identity and also revolts against the racial and colour based discrimination of western and eastern. She abandons the Indian inferiority saying,

"I am India, very brown, born in Malabar".

Here by identifying herself as 'brown' she also challenges the Indian social system where girls having white skin were given importance in marriage. So she attacks the love for 'whiteness' of both colonizers and Indian colonized men.

Das also mocks the prevalent attitude towards education where an Indian was not allowed to write in English freely. If anyone do so her family members and relatives mock her and instruct to practice the mother tongue as English is a foreign language specially of "Saheb Babus" (British men). In her reply she says in the poem that She can speak in three language, write in two, dream in one. The first three languages are English, Hindi, Malayalam, the second two are referred to English and Malayalam and the last one is the

poetic language in which she dreams. It means dream has its own free and universal language. We may quote from the poem,

“I speak three languages, write in  
Two, dream in one.”

Most significantly she says that in any language she speaks is her own. Even if there is any distortion in that language it should not be treated as a fault, it is the originality of the voice who speaks in it. The poet said,

The language I speak,  
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
All mine, mine alone.

Though it's not pure British English, but this hybrid-language is her free expression. English language is to her like the crowing of crow or the roaring of lions. So English is to her as natural as 'crowing or 'roaring', there is no artificiality. This language is not of British colonizers, it's the expression of a native Indian.

We can discuss the point of Kamala Das with the view of Bhabha. Here the fact is that when a native man knowingly or unknowingly follow his masters he basically disobeys the power system that proves the hollowness of those masters. So it's an elusive weapon of decolonization that is not apparent in common eyes. The colonizers don't understand that it's a trap for them also in which the natives are given opportunity to be face to face to their foreign masters. It provides an ironic compromise where the 'otherness' of colonized is decreased, rather their indigenous originality is flourished. Bhabha said in his text, "*It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come.*" Here mimic becomes mockery of the foreigners where the natives come to realize the gravity of their aboriginality and then they will must raise their head against the callousness. So Bhabha said, "*The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.*" It threatened the "Anglicization" policy which was intended to approve the only the "Anglicized English" not "Indian Englishness". British authority wished to have a follower, submissive educated Indian who would learn English only to assist them in administration. But this "Englishness" was not confined within its master's purpose, but in course of time English was familiarized in Indian style that subvert the hegemonic side of mimicry. Indian were then not mere "not quite/not white" in Bhabha's term. It is here to be noted that as the mimicry of Indian to their British colonizer diminished the difference between colonizers and colonized, so the concept of Anglicizing Indians threatens to Indianized Englishness that is a slight reversal. The colonizers intended to have a difference with the colonized. But if those colonized become "almost the same" there will be no such difference. But the fact was that this mimicry lead the colonized men to be subversive and resistant.

If look on Kamala Das's view, It's the mixture hybrid of her native and foreign language. It is a voice of the oppressed people. We can found the sense of 'self' in an 'other' that is not inferior in any sense to her colonizers. It is not the mimicry of slave mind, but the protest of independent soul. Kamala Das rejected the narrowness of mimicry of using English in writing that it's not mere following or copying but it has indigenusness. Language is the outburst of inner self that must not be confined within a particular region of race. Here we can found the humanistic view of Das where any language is the conveyances of human expression, her joys, fears. So an Indian can freely use English in writing or speaking, though it is half English but it's the honest utterance of human soul. Linguistic identity depends upon the user not upon the ground of colonizer-colonized rank. In order to establish her anti-colonial attitude Das compared the slavish colonized mind with some abstract things. Their minds are compared with the silence and deafness of tree in storm, wearers storm can do anything to a tree but it never resists. Same situation is apparent in colonial period in India when they blindly follow or mimic the colonizers as they instructed but Indian never did protest. This mimicry is actually slavery and compared to the Monsoon clouds that moves according to the wish of storm. The funeral pyre is also helpless in burning the dead as it can not do anything by its will. Situation was similar to the native Indians. Here another important fact is that Das used many native (Hindi or Malayalam) words in her English poem like 'Monsoon', 'Saree'. etc. Is is clear that Kamala Das protested against the mimetic attitude of colonized Indian. Mimicry for her is a sort of resistance through which a colonized may be equal to the colonizer. English Language is not the property of westerners that we must use it according to their will.

An important fact of mimicry is that the colonized men never can be mingled properly with their masters in mimicry. There must be a slight difference in language, culture, concept. This difference will mock the conventional submission to masters and It will make them enable to evaluate their social, economic, educational, normative status inflicted by foreign hegemonic power. In Bhabha's view the mimic intention

of the master become the strategic desire of followers who subvert the location from one disadvantage to one of advantage. Post colonial research and study influence the Third World to raise voice against the rulers that voice was given to them to praise or follow those rulers during colonial period. We can compare the situation with Lacanian concept. In the first stage of mimicry the colonized belong to 'mirror stage' who does not know language, code, symbol. They once look to themselves and then to masters. But when they enter into "Symbolic stage" that gain the power to speak, protest. Similarly now mimicry becomes a concept of resistance and the authorial voice of newly independent men. Bhabha said, "*It is the process of the fixation of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory.....and therefore necessarily raises the question of the authorization of colonial representations*"

In conclusion we may say that evaluating Kamala Das's attitude in "An Introduction" ,it is clear that she is able to establish Indian sensibility in English language that no doubt has strengthen the backbone of Indian literature in English. Now a days Indian writers are well appreciated throughout the world that is the ultimate success of becoming a leader form mere mimicker. So K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his "Indian Writing in English" das rightly remarked about Kamala das as "aggressively individualistic of new poets".

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**How people treat you is their karma. How you react is yours**

**~ Dr. Wayne Dyer**