

KAMALA DAS AND HER POETRY

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INTRODUCTION:

Kamala Suraiyya sometimes named as Kamala Madhavikutty (31 march 1934 – 31 may 2009) was a major Indian English poet and litterateur and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from Kerala, India. Her popularity in Kerala is based chiefly on her short stories and autobiography, while her oeuvre in English, written under the name Kamala Das, is noted for the fiery poems and explicit autobiography. Her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power, but also marked her as an iconoclast in her generation. On 31 may 2009, aged 75, she died at a hospital in Pune, but has earned considerable respect years.

EARLY LIFE:

Kamala was born in Punnayurkulam, Thrissur district in Kerala, on 31 march 1934, to V.M. Nair, a former managing editor of the widely circulated Malayalam daily Mathrubhumi, and Nalapat Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poet. She spent her childhood between Calcutta, where her father was employed as senior officer in the Walford Transport Company that sold Bentley and Nalapat ancestral home in Punnayurkulam. Like her mother, Balamani Amma, Kamala Das also excelled in writing. Her love of poetry began at an early age through the influence of her great uncle, Nalapat Narayana Menon, a prominent writer.

At the age of 15, she got married to bank officer Madhava Das, who encouraged her writing interests, and she started writing and publishing both in English and in Malayalam. Calcutta in the 1960s was a tumultuous time for the arts, and Kamala Das was one of the many voices that came up and started appearing in cultural anthologies along with a general of Indian English poets.

LITERARY CAREER:

She was noted for her many Malayalam short stories as well as many poems written in English. Das was also a syndicated columnist. She once claimed that that “poetry does not sell in this country (India),” but her forthright columns, which sounded off on everything from women’s issues and child care to politics, were popular.

Das’s first book of poetry, “Summer in Calcutta” was a breath of fresh air in Indian English poetry. She wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish. Ms. Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and anybody at a time when Indian poets were still governed by “19th-century diction, sentiment and romanticized love”. Her second book of poetry, *The Descendants* was even more explicit, urging women to:

Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of
Long hair, the musk of sweet between the breasts,
The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your
Endless female hungers...”—*The Looking Glass*

This directness of her voice led to comparisons with Marguerite Duras and Sylvia Plath. At the age of 42, she published a daring autobiography, ‘My Story’, it was originally written in Malayalam titled *Ente Katha* and later she translated it into English. Later she admitted that much of the autobiography had fictional elements. Kamala Das wrote on a diverse range of topics, often disparate from the story of a poor old servant, about the sexual disposition of upper middle class women living near a metropolitan city or in the middle of the ghetto. Some of her better-known stories include *Pakshiyude Manam*, *Neypayasam*, *Thanuppu*, and *Chandana Marangal*. She wrote a few novels, out of which *Neemathalam Pootha Kalam*, which was received favourably by the reading public as well as the critics, stands out.

She travelled extensively to read poetry to Germany’s University of Duisburg-Essen, University of Bonn and University of Duisburg universities, Adelaide writer’s festival, Frankfurt book Fair, University of Kingston, Jamaica, Singapore, and South Bank Festival (London), Concordia University, etc. her works are available in French, Spanish, Russian, German and Japanese.