

KAMALA DAS

A POET OF FEMININE
LONGINGS



BIOGRAPHY AND EARLY LIFE

Kamala Das born on March 31, 1934 in Malabar, Kerala. Das is one of the best known contemporary Indian Women Writers.

Writing in two languages, English and Malayalam, Das has authored many autobiographical works and novels.

Her upbringing in a conservative family deeply influenced her writing, as she grappled with the constraints of literature and patriarchy.



WORKS OF KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das's poetry collections included:

Summer in Calcutta (1965),

The Descendants (1967)

The Old Playhouse, and Other Poems (1973).

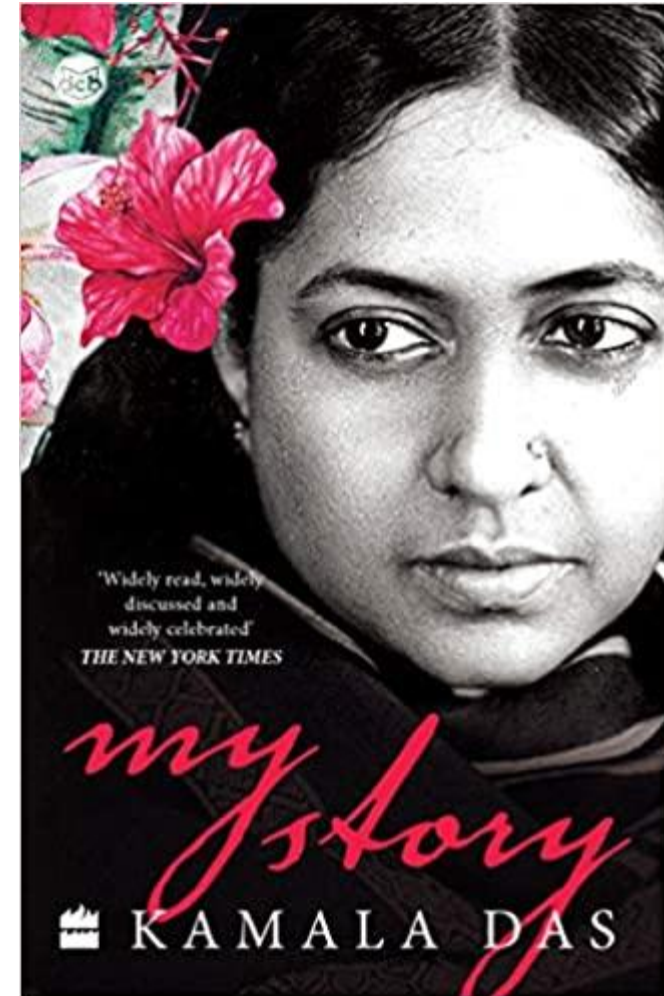
Alphabet of Lust (1976)

A Doll for the Child Prostitute (1977) and

Padmavati the Harlot (1992).

Notable among her many Malayalam works were the short-story collection *Thanuppu* (1967; "Cold") and the [memoir](#) *Balyakalasmaranakal* (1987; "Memories of Childhood").

Perhaps her best-known work was an [autobiography](#), which first appeared as a series of columns in the weekly *Malayalanadu*, then in Malayalam as *Ente Katha* (1973), and finally in English as *My Story* (1976).



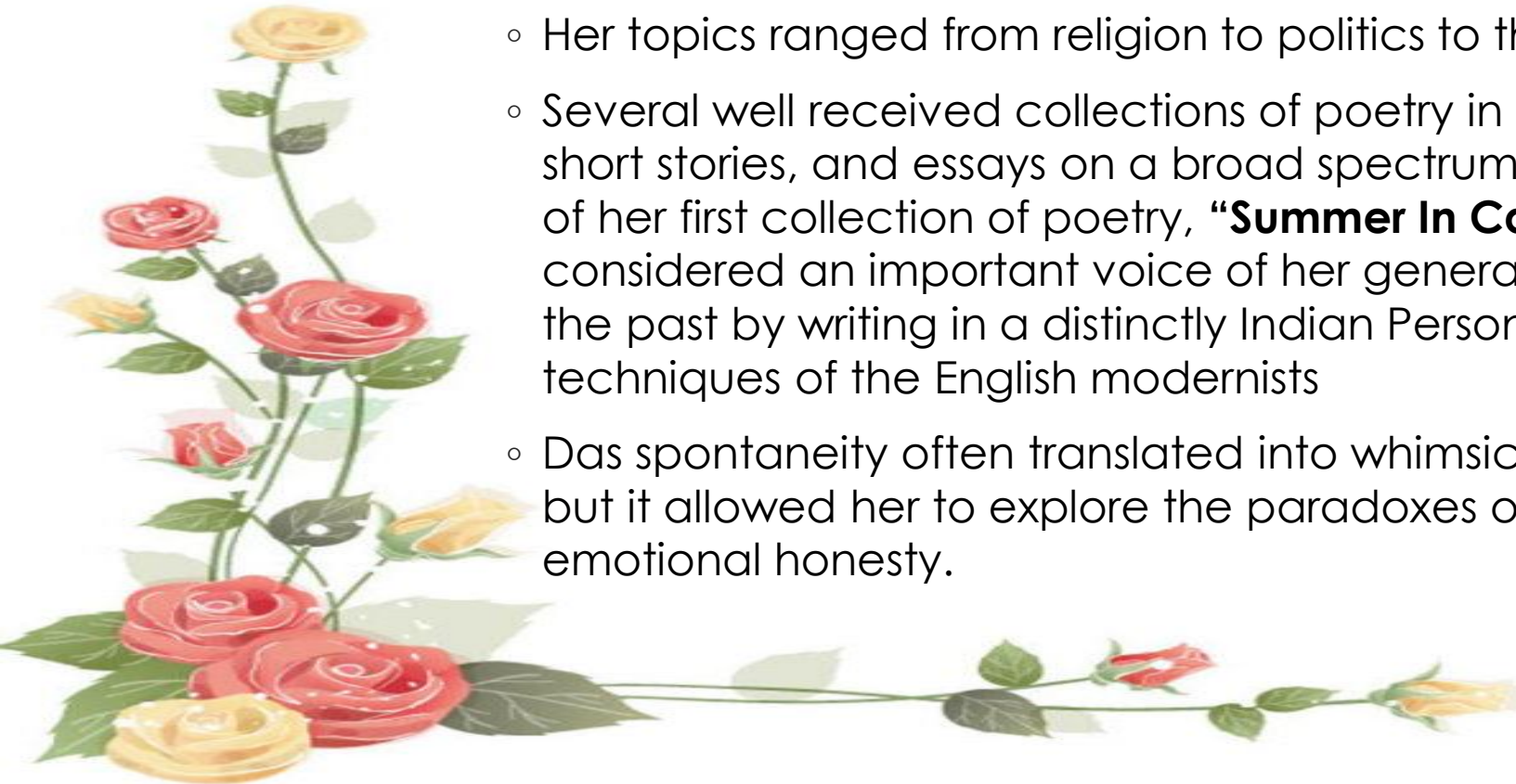
LITERARY CAREER

- Das was noted for her many Malayalam short stories as well as many poems written in English.
- She was also a syndicated columnist.
- She once claimed 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 first book of poetry, **Summer in Calcutta** was released with fresh air in Indian English poetry.
- Her works are known for their originality, Versatility and the indigenous flavour of the soil.
- She had also held positions as vice chairperson in **Kerala Sahitya Academy** and in **Kerala Forestry Board President of the Children’s Film Society**.

A PROLIFIC WRITER



- Das wrote more than 20 books.
- Her topics ranged from religion to politics to the beauty secrets of Nair women.
- Several well received collections of poetry in English, numerous volumes of short stories, and essays on a broad spectrum of subjects. Since the publication of her first collection of poetry, **“Summer In Calcutta”** (1965), Das has been considered an important voice of her generation, exemplified by a break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian Persona rather than adopting the techniques of the English modernists
- Das spontaneity often translated into whimsically and earned the ire of critics, but it allowed her to explore the paradoxes of life and relationships with emotional honesty.



HER CONVERSION TO ISLAM

- Kamala Das was born in a conservative Hindu Nair family and had a royal ancestry.
- On 11 December, 1999 at the age of 65 Das converted to Islam.
- She is also Kamala Suraiya, the name she took after converting to Islam in 1999.
- She was also named Madhavikutti, the pseudonym she gave herself when writing in Malayalam
- Finally, she is also 'Ami', a pet name she reserved for herself in her memoirs.



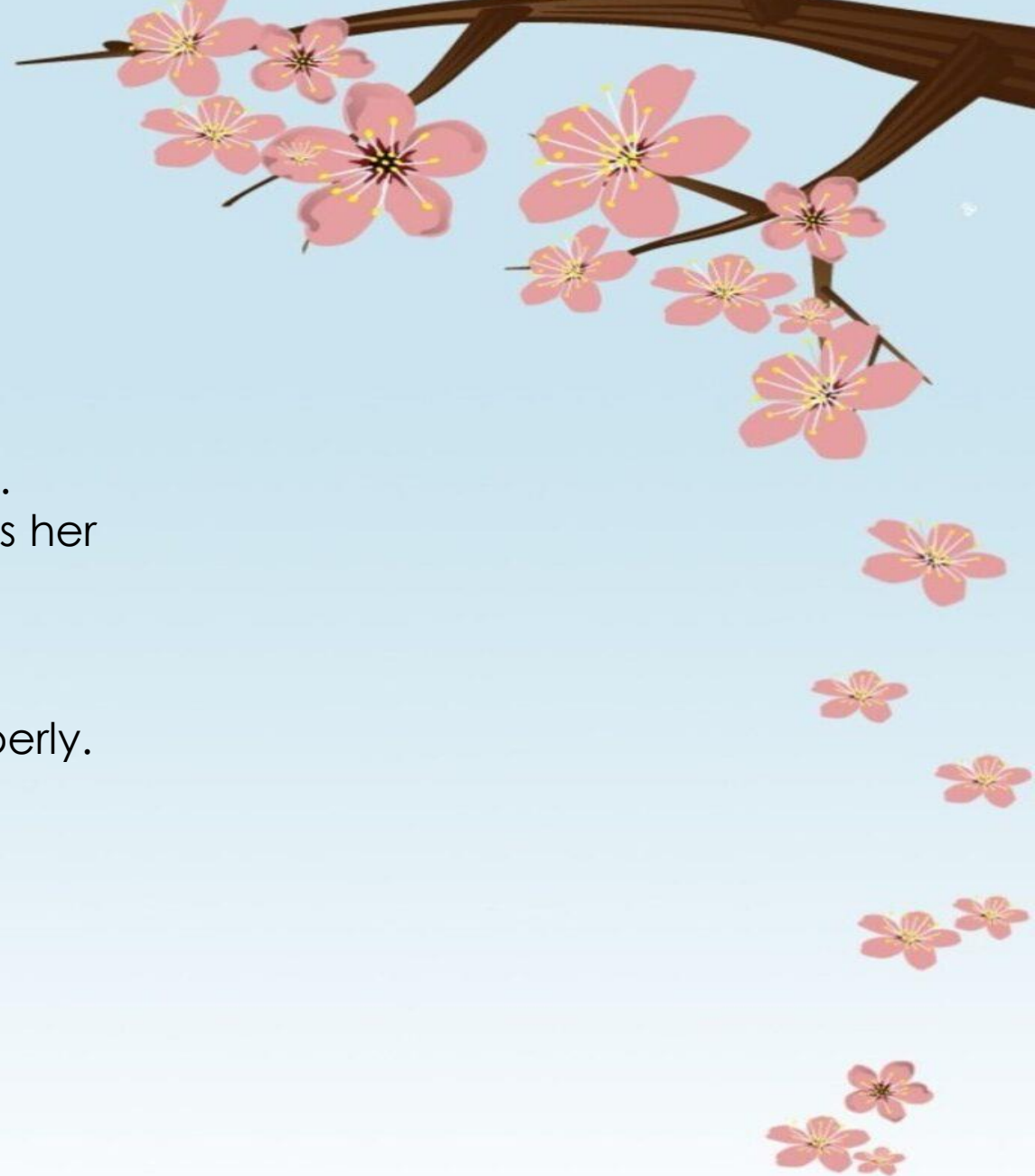
THEMATIC CONCERNS

1) FRUSTRATION IN LOVE:

Kamala Das is a poet of love and sexual relationship. Love and sex form the main theme in her poetry. Her poetry is largely an expression of her frustration in love. She always speaks of her unfulfilled love and expresses her need for love.

In '**The Sunshine Cat**' the poet abuses her husband because he never loved her and never used her properly. She calls him a selfish and cowardly man who was a ruthless watcher of her sexual act with other men.

This frustration of her love boils over in poems like 'The Invitation' and '**The Looking Glass**'.



2) FEMININE SENSIBILITY:

Kamala Das's poetry is a frank and straightforward expression of feminine sensibility.

The poet Kamala Das is inextricably linked to Indian feminism's past; in fact, hers is the country's first and most significant feminist movement. No matter what she wrote, she always aimed to depict some of the most contentious aspects of Indian culture, especially the pressing challenges facing women.

Kamala Das experienced the tremendous tragedies of family life firsthand. Her marriage had been a complex disaster. Throughout her life, she saw partnerships fall apart. Kamala Das was forced to deal with the upheaval of a disintegrating marriage. She observed and experienced the blind patriarchy's power over her, which crushed all of her goals, aspirations, and concerns for her health.

She revolts against the exploitation of women. She expresses anger against the male dominance in the society. She attempted to establish her identity as women through her poems.

At the same time she tried to impart an identity to Indian women. Thus her poetry signals the advent of new phenomenon in Indo-Anglican poetry.



3) TREATMENT OF SEX:

In fact, the poetry of Kamala Das is devoted to her confessions of her sex life. Sexual humiliation becomes a central theme in her poetry. She goes to the extreme in her frank treatment of sex.

In 'The Looking Glass' she says:

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

Kamala Das has added a new dimension to the poetry of love and sex. Her frank admission and bold treatment of her private life make her a great confessional poet. In this context she can be compared with Gauri Deshpande.



4) AS A POET OF PROTEST:

Kamala is a poet of protest also. She rebels against the conventions, traditions and accepted norms of society.

Her protest is directed against injustices and exploitation.

She made her poetry a vehicle for the expression of her resentments against male domination over women.

In 'The Sunshine Cat' she writes in a strong tone of protest:

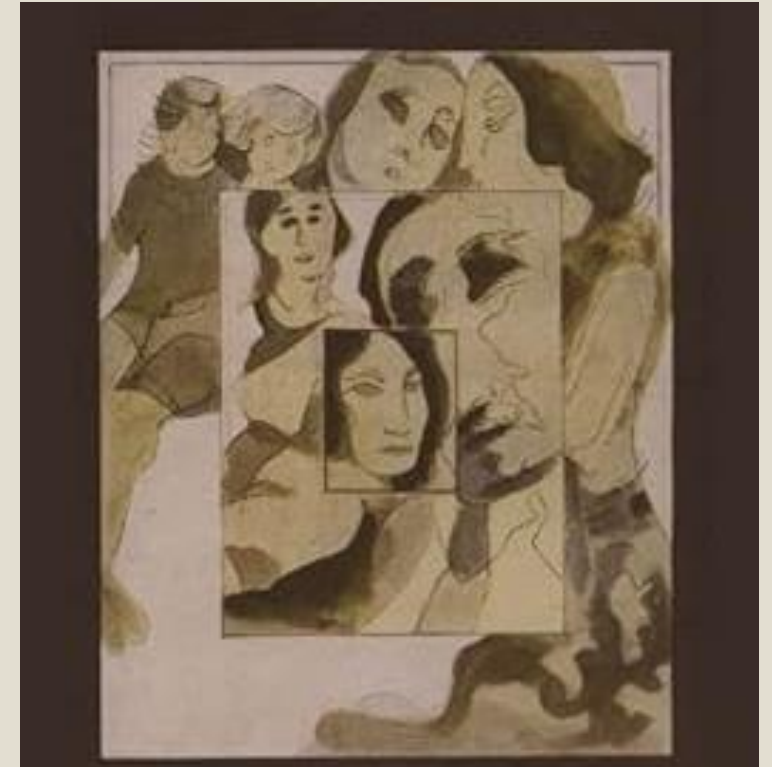
***Being selfish
And a coward, the husband who neither loved nor
Used her, but was a ruthless watcher.....***



POETIC STYLE

AS A CONFESSIONAL POET:

- Kamala Das is a confessional poet. In this context she can be compared with Ramanujan, Ezekiel, R. Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and J. Wright.
- As a true confessional poet she takes her readers into confidence about her private life. She shows with remarkable frankness the wrongs, injustice and the humiliation that she suffered in a male dominant world. She has candidly described her traumatic experiences of lovemaking and of the sexual act.
- We can easily find the tone of confession in her poems like 'The Sunshine Cat', 'The Invitation', and 'The Looking Glass'. In 'The Invitation' she has shamelessly described her sexual experience:
 -
 - ***I want no other On the bed with him, the boundaries of Paradise had shrunk to a mere Six by two and afterwards . . .***



2) MASTERY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

- A command of the English language is naturally the first requirement of an Indo- Anglican poet.
- Kamala Das's command over English language deserves to be admired. This command has duly been recognized by most of the scholars.
- She has a vast range of vocabulary. She understands the precise meanings of words. She can differentiate between the shades of meanings.
- We may take any poem by Kamala Das, and we shall find evidence of her command on the English language.

3) CHOICE OF WORDS AND PHRASES

- Kamala Das deserves high praise for her choice of words and for combining those words into phrases, clauses and sentences.
- In the choice of words she exercises a special care. Her words are neither splendid nor glittering. According to the requirements of the poem, Kamala Das is able to use simple and tough words.
- She is a poet in the confessional mode and thus her tone is conversational and her diction is often colloquial. The words come to her effortlessly and become one with emotions.
- Kamala Das reveals a mastery of phrases also. Here is an example of her use of words:

***“Cowering Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic
Became a dwarf.”
[The Old Playhouse].***

4) USE OF IMAGERY

- The poetry of Kamala Das abounds in imagery. Her imagery covers a wide range. It is by no means monotonous or boring. It is suggestive and functional.
- Her images and symbols are taken from the commonplace. They reveal the poet's own life. They fully support the theme of her poetry.
- In her poetry the imagery of love and sex is predominant. 'The Freaks', 'The Sunshine Cat' and 'The Old Playhouse' deal with such imagery.
- Some of her poems deal with the imagery of sights witnessed by the poet herself.
- In 'A Hot Noon in Malabar' we get a catalogue of sights. Then there is the imagery of motherhood. Her 'Jaisurya' is a fine example of it.

CONCLUSION

- Kamala Suraiyya formerly known as Kamala Das , was a major Indian English poet and littérateur 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. The critics generally admire as for her franker treatment of love and sex, bold presentation and the confessional statements.