

Kamala Das

Kamala Das was born on 31st March 1934 in the town of Punnayukulam in the district of Thrissur, India. Her love for writing poetry sprouted at an early age as she grew amidst her mother, the poet, Nalapat Balamani Amma and great uncle Nalapat Narayan Menon who was an author.

Kamala das pioneered Indian English poetry in post-independence India with the publication of her first poetry collection, titled, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965). Her successive books of poems include *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996) etc. She won Kerala Sahitya Akademy award for the story 'Thanuppu' for the year 1984.

The pain and anguish characterise her poetry due to her loss of freedom to live her life the way she liked. Her love poems are rooted in the defiance of the patriarchal traditions of the country. She wrote about women desires with great candidness in her poetry.

Shiv K Kumar writes about Kamala das' works:

...Kamala Das's poetry which exposes male chauvinism, its persistence endeavour to play the role of the 'stronger sex'. No wonder, the contemporary woman writer is never tired of articulating her disgust for the insensitive, articulate male... , a recurring element of sex in her work, it is more to expose it as a form of male dominance, than to glorify it. All that Kamla Das is trying to do is to salvage the Indian woman from the sexual exploitation of man, her husband or lover."

Critics have compared her poetry to that of Sylvia Plath's and Annie Sexton's for the confessional tone she employs in her poems. Her poetry is the

outcome of a struggle to relate her private experiences with the larger world outside. It is a struggle to maintain her personal identity. Her autobiography, *My Story*, raised quite a storm in the Indian literary space given the scandalous confessional content of the book. What makes her work engrossing is the treatment of love that is quite discerningly strung to one's sexual yearnings, a space that was considered scandalous at the time and seldom broached in public spheres even by men, let alone women. Kamala continued to write until her demise in 2009 and her last book titled *The Kept Woman and Other Stories*, featuring her translated stories was published posthumously.