

Kamala Das

Indian author **Kamala Das**, Malayalam pen name **Madhavikutty**, Muslim name **Kamala Surayya**,

March 31, 1934 Kerala, (British India)—died May 31, 2009, [Pune](#),

Language of writing : English and Malayalam

Kamala Das wrote openly and frankly about female sexual desire and the experience of being an Indian woman.

Das was part of a generation of Indian writers whose work centred on personal rather than colonial experiences, and her short stories, [poetry](#), memoirs, and essays brought her respect and [notoriety](#) in equal measures.

She began writing poetry when she was a child. When she was 15 years old, she married Madhava Das, a banking executive many years her senior, and they moved to Bombay (now [Mumbai](#)). Das had three sons and did her writing at night.

Family: Das was born into a high-status family. Her mother, Nalapat Balamani Amma, was a well-known poet, and her father, V.M. [Nair](#), was an automobile company executive and a journalist. She grew up in what is now [Kerala](#) and in Calcutta (now [Kolkata](#)), where her father worked.

Works : Das's poetry collections included *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), and *The Old Playhouse, and Other Poems* (1973). Subsequent English-language works included the [novel](#) *Alphabet of Lust* (1976) and the short stories "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). A shockingly [intimate](#) work, it came to be regarded as a classic. In later life Das said that parts of the book were fictional.

In 1999 she controversially converted to [Islam](#), renaming herself Kamala Surayya. She received many literary awards, including the Asian World Prize for Literature in 1985.