Contemporary Literary Criticism

GLC 191

#### Volume 191

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers







#### Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 191

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Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author's career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted Criticism is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief Annotations explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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## Kamala Das

(Has also written under the pseudonyms Madhavikutty and Kamala Suraiyya) Indian poet, short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist, nonfiction writer, children's writer, and autobiographer. The following entry presents an overview of Das's career through 2000.

#### INTRODUCTION

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, 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 who exemplifies a break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian persona rather than adopting the techniques of the English modernists. Das's provocative poems are known for their unflinchingly honest explorations of the self and female sexuality, urban life, women's roles in traditional Indian society, issues of postcolonial identity, and the political and personal struggles of marginalized people. Das's work in English has been widely anthologized in India, Australia, and the West, and she has received many awards and honors, including the P.E.N. Philippines Asian Poetry Prize (1963), Kerala Sahitya Academy Award for her writing in Malayalam (1969), Chiman Lal Award for fearless journalism (1971), the ASAN World Prize (1985), and the Sahitya Akademi Award for her poetry in English (1985). In 1984, she was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Das was born into an aristocratic Nair Hindu family in Malabar (now Kerala), India, on March 31, 1934. Her maternal grandfather and great-grandfather were Rajas, a caste of Hindu nobility. Her love of poetry began at an early age through the influence of her maternal greatuncle, Narayan Menon, a prominent writer, and her mother, Balamani Amma, a well-known Malayali poet. Das was also deeply affected by the poetry of the sacred writings kept by the matriarchal community of Nairs. Das's father, a successful managing director for a Brit-

ish automobile firm, was descended from peasant stock and favored Gandhian principles of austerity. The combination of "royal" and "peasant" identities, along with the atmosphere of colonialism and its pervasive racism, produced feelings of inadequacy and alienation for Das. Educated in Calcutta and Malabar, Das began writing at age six and had her first poem published by P.E.N. India at age fourteen. She did not receive a university education. She was married in 1949 to Madhava Das, an employee of the Reserve Bank of India who later worked for the United Nations. She was sixteen years old when the first of her three sons was born; at eighteen, she began to write obsessively. Although Das and Madhava were romantically incompatible according to Das's 1976 autobiography, My Story, which describes his homosexual liaisons and her extramarital affairs, Madhava supported her writing. His career took them to Calcutta, New Delhi, and Bombay, where Das's poetry was influenced by metropolitan life as well as by her emotional experiences. In addition to writing poetry, fiction, and autobiography, Das served as editor of the poetry section of The Illustrated Weekly of India from 1971 to 1972 and 1978 to 1979. In 1981 Das and her husband retired to Kerala. Das ran as an Independent for the Indian Parliament in 1984. After her husband died, Das converted to Islam and changed her name to Kamala Suraiyya. She currently lives in Kerala, where she writes a syndicated column on culture and politics.

#### **MAJOR WORKS**

Das published six volumes of poetry between 1965 and 1985. Drawing upon religious and domestic imagery to explore a sense of identity. Das tells of intensely personal experiences, including her growth into womanhood, her unsuccessful quest for love in and outside of marriage, and her life in matriarchal rural South India after inheriting her ancestral home. Since the publication of Summer in Calcutta, Das has been a controversial figure, known for her unusual imagery and candor. In poems such as "The Dance of the Eunuchs" and "The Freaks." Das draws upon the exotic to discuss her sexuality and her quest for fulfillment. In "An Introduction," Das makes public traditionally private experiences, suggesting that women's personal feelings of longing and loss are part of the collective experience of womanhood. In the collection The Descendants (1967), the poem "The Maggots" frames the pain of lost love

with ancient Hindu myths, while the poem "The Looking-Glass" suggests that the very things society labels taboo are the things that women are supposed to give. In The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973), poems such as "Substitute," "Gino," and "The Suicide" examine physical love's failure to provide fulfillment, escape from the self, and exorcism of the past, whereas poems such as "The Inheritance" address the integrity of the artistic self in the face of religious fanaticism. In Tonight, This Savage Rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy (1979), Das invokes Krishna in her explorations of the tensions between physical love and spiritual transcendence. The Anamalai Poems (1985), a series of short poems written after Das was defeated in the 1984 parliamentary elections, reworks the classical Tamil akam ("interior") poems that contrast the grandeur and permanence of nature with the transience of human history. Poems such as "Delhi 1984" and "Smoke in Colombo" evoke the massacre of the Sikhs and the civil war in Sri Lanka. In My Story. originally published in serial format, Das provides details of her extramarital affairs and her unhappy marriage to Madhava Das. She is also the author of a novel. The Alphabet of Lust (1977), and several volumes of short stories in English. Under the name Madhavi Kutty, Das has published many books in the Malayalam language.

#### CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical response to Das's poetry has been intimately connected to critical perception of her personality and politics; her provocative poetry has seldom produced lukewarm reactions. While reviewers of Das's early poetry have praised its fierce originality, bold images, exploration of female sexuality, and intensely personal voice, they lamented that it lacked attention to structure and craftsmanship. Scholars such as Devindra Kohli, Eunice de Souza, and Sunil Kumar have found powerful feminist images in Das's poetry, focusing on critiques of marriage, motherhood, women's relationships to their bodies and power over their sexuality, and the roles women are offered in traditional Indian society. Many critics have analyzed Das as a "confessional" poet, writing in the tradition of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Denise Levertov. Some scholars, such as Vimala Rao, Igbar Kaur, and Vrinda Naur, have deemed Das's poetry, autobiography, and essays frustratingly inconsistent, self-indulgent, and equivocal, although they, too, have praised her compelling images and original voice. Such commentators have suggested that Das is both overexposed and overrated. Other scholars, such as P. P. Raveendran, have connected the emphasis on the self in Das's work to larger historical and cultural contexts and complicated, shifting postcolonial identities. Indian critics have disagreed about the significance of Das's choice to write of her experiences as an Indian

woman in English; some scholars suggest that, in her shunning of traditional aesthetic form, she has created a new language for the expression of colonial contradictions. Despite disagreement over the aesthetic qualities and consistency of Das's body of poetry, scholars agree that Das is an important figure whose bold and honest voice has re-energized Indian writing in English.

#### PRINCIPAL WORKS

Tharisunilam [Fallow Fields] (short stories) 1962

Summer in Calcutta (poetry) 1965 The Descendants (poetry) 1967 The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (poetry) 1973 My Story (autobiography) 1976 The Alphabet of Lust (novel) 1977 A Doll for the Child Prostitute (short stories) 1977 Tonight, This Savage Rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy (poetry) 1979 The Heart of Britain (nonfiction) 1983 Collected Poems (poetry) 1984 Kamala Das: A Collage (plays) 1984 The Anamalai Poems (poetry) 1985 Palayanam (short stories) 1990 Padamavati. the Harlot and Other Stories (short stories) 1994 The Sandal Trees and Other Stories (short stories) 1995

Only the Soul Knows How to Sing: Selections from Kamala Das (poetry) 1996

The Both of the Columnist (2022) [52 Kamala

The Path of the Columnist (essays) [as Kamala Suraiyya] 2000

#### **CRITICISM**

#### Fritz Blackwell (essay date 1977-1978)

SOURCE: Blackwell, Fritz. "Krishna Motifs in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 13, nos. 1-4 (1977-1978): 9-14.

[In the following essay, Blackwell contrasts the use of the Krishna motif in four poems by the Indian poets Kamala Das and Sarojini Naidu.]

Traditional imagery in modern poetry in English

Let us consider four poems, two each by two Indian poets writing in English. The older of the two is Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), who is the author of three

volumes of poetry: *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1915-1916). This first poem is taken from the second volume:

"Song of Radha the Milkmaid"

I carried my curds to the Mathura fair . . . How softly the heifers were lowing . . . I wanted to cry, "Who will buy, who will buy These curds that are white as the clouds in the sky When the breezes of *Shrawan* are blowing?" But my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved, They laughed as I cried without knowing:

Govinda! Govinda! . . .

How softly the river was flowing!

I carried my pots to the Mathura tide . . . How gaily the rowers were rowing! . . . My comrades called, "Ho! let us dance, let us sing And wear saffron garments to welcome the spring, And pluck the new buds that are blowing." But my heart was so full of your music, Beloved, They mocked me when I cried without knowing:

Govinda! Govinda! . . .

How gaily the river was flowing!

I carried my gifts to the Mathura shrine . . . How brightly the torches were glowing!
I folded my hands at the altar to pray "O shining ones guard us by night and by day"— And loudly the conch shells were blowing.
But my heart was so lost in your worship, Beloved, They were wroth when I cried without knowing:

\*\*Govinda! Govinda!\*\*

Govinda! Govinda!

How brightly the river was flowing.

The following poem is taken from the last volume:

"The Flute-Player of Brindaban"

Why didst thou play thy matchless flute Neath the Kadamba tree, And wound my idly dreaming heart With poignant melody, So where thou goest I must go, My flute-player, with thee?

Still must I like a homeless bird
Wander, forsaking all;
The earthly loves and worldly lures
That held my life in thrall,
And follow, follow, answering
Thy magical flute-call.

To Indra's golden-flowering groves
Where streams immortal flow,
Or to sad Yama's silent Courts
Engulfed in lampless woe,
Where'er thy subtle flute I hear
Beloved I must go!

The second poetess is Kamala Das (b. 1934), generally acknowledged as one of the foremost contemporary

poets writing in India. These poems are taken from collection *The Descendants* (1967):

#### "The Maggots"

At sunset, on the river bank, Krishna Loved her for the last time and left . . .

That night in her husband's arms, Radha felt So dead that he asked, What is wrong, Do you mind my kisses, love? and she said, No, not at all, but thought, What is

It to the corpse if the maggots nip?

#### "Radha"

The long waiting Had made their bond so chaste, and all the doubting

And the reasoning So that in his first true embrace, she was girl

And virgin crying Everything in me Is melting, even the hardness at the core O Krishna, I am melting, melting, melting

Nothing remains but You. . . .

A favorite motif of the medieval *bhakti* or devotional poets of India, as well as of the later Himalayan schools of *bhakti* miniatures, was the *abhisārikā*—a woman going to meet her lover, braving the elements, blackness of night, and dangers of the forest—including snakes and various categories of ghosts and goblins. She is, of course, Radha, or at least a *gopi*, and the lover she is risking life and social acceptance to seek, is Krishna. And it is all metaphorical of the soul's (Radha) quest for God (Krishna). Very often the poet identified himself with the heroine in the conventional signature line at the end of the poem. Even when not, however, as in Vidyapati, she was usually the sympathetic focus.

Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das, two twentieth-century Indian poets, have employed this approach in two poems each, with startlingly different attitudes and results. They are about fifty years apart and reflect the difference between two generations of poets, the first of which wrote in a manner which one observer, Prabhakar Machwe, has labeled as "the traditional mysticoromantic idealistic," and the second as the "angry young."

The members of the first came to prominence during the freedom struggle, in which they participated. Naidu is almost a paradigm for this generation. She abandoned poetry for political action shortly after meeting Gandhi, succeeded him as president of the Congress party in 1925, was imprisoned in 1942, and became governor of India's largest state, Uttar Pradesh, in 1947. Her

biography, fittingly, has been classified by the Library of Congress call number system with books on history and not with her literary works.<sup>2</sup>

Those of the second generation express dissatisfaction and disenchantment, even disillusionment, with the hopes and ideals that the first nurtured them upon. This has not resulted in a call for action, but rather in, as Machwe puts it, "the quiet acceptance of the fatalistic misery of the silent majority." Das could well be the paradigm. While her poetry is often frankly personal. she does not lead a life in public as did Naidu, and little is known about her private life other than some intriguing rumors and speculation based upon referencesoblique and direct—in her poetry as to her sexual interests and needs (in one, "Composition," she tells us, "Reader, / you may say, / now here is girl with vast / sexual hungers, / a bitch after my own heart. / But, / I am not yours for the asking."). One critic, Subhas Chandra Saha, has suggested that her poetry reflects a "transmuting [of] loneliness into sex-obsession."

With the "sex-obsession" there is a concomitant concern with death—both existentially and in terms of use of metaphorical image. Naidu, too, treats of death, and links it with love (especially in the long series of twenty-four poems entitled "The Temple" and subtitled "A Pilgrimage of Love" found in *The Broken Wing*); but Naidu's love is not explicitly sexual, and Das's sex is sensual but not devotional. Naidu recognizes suffering and death, but accepts them as a part of life, which is primarily joyous, and as such is celebrated in her poetry, or as she labeled much of it, songs. Das is tormented by, if not obsessed with, death and existential pain, does not find life joyous and does not celebrate it—nor does she really find sex joyous, though she does find it necessary and valuable as sensuous experience. Naidu's love or devotion is fulfilling. Das's sex is at best only temporarily so—and then not really fulfilling so much as enriching; it is the ultimate, and perhaps only worthwhile, form of human contact—and it remains primarily if not entirely human, not ascending to the divine as does Naidu's love, and only transitory, not permanent.

Specifically in regard to the Krishna poems—or perhaps more properly, the Radha poems—Naidu's are nice little songs, pleasant through their rhythm and sound, and flowing. Those of Das, though much shorter, seem heavier; they are not at all "nice," but intense and arresting, making maximum use of imagery. Curiously, while Naidu's is related in the first person, and Das's in the third, the latter's seem more personal. This is in spite of—or perhaps even because of—the religious and devotional nature of Naidu's and the literary and psycho-sexual nature of Das's poems.

The poets also reflect the century-old antagonism within Krishna-bhakti. Whether the Radha-Krishna relation-

ship is purely spiritual or metaphorical, or whether it is as well physical, does one simply adore Krishna, or does she seek union with him? Do Jayadeva's Krishna and Radha indeed enjoy sexual congress in his *Gita Govinda*, as the Kangra miniatures clearly express, or is such an interpretation a misunderstanding of the nature of the religious metaphor, as the contemporary Hare Krsna people of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada maintain?

Das's Krishna and Radha are lovers; the understanding of the metaphor or motif of Krishna and Radha as being lovers seems to be taken for granted by her. On the other hand, there is no suggestion of sexual union as an object of desire on the part of Naidu's Radha or "I." Her poems are not necessarily anti-sexual it is simply that sex is not a matter of concern in them; it is a nonsexual devotion that is expressed. While in Das's, the sex implies a deep and intense relationship, it is not devotional. Though both her poems, especially "Radha," might imply a union deeper than the physical one expressed, I feel her concern to be literary and existential, not religious; I think she is using a religious concept for a literary motif and metaphor. The "melting, melting, melting" in "Radha," one critic, Devindra Kohli, has suggested "is the allegorical embrace of the temporal and the eternal, and her sense of dissolution":4 yet it seems to me reminiscent of a poem of Vidyapati's wherein Radha relates,

O friend, I cannot tell you Whether he was near or far, real or a dream. Like a vine of lightning, As I chained the dark one. I felt a river flooding in my heart. Like a shining moon, I devoured that liquid face. I felt stars shooting around me. The sky fell with my dress, Leaving my ravished breasts. I was rocking like the earth. In my storming breath I could hear my ankle-bells. Sounding like bees. Drowned in the last waters of dissolution, I knew that this was not the end.

Then the signature line:

Says Vidyāpati: How can I possibly believe such nonsense?<sup>5</sup>

W. G. Archer, in a note to the poem, found the line "I was rocking like the earth" comparable to a passage in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, "where a lover asks 'Did the earth move?' and the girl replies 'Yes. It moved."

Further, while Krishna *bhaktas* or devotees were later to ascribe religious implications to Vidyapati's poems, Archer states that there is "no evidence" that Vidyapati

was "a special devotee of Krishna," nor even "a practising member of the Vaishnava cult. Indeed all his later writings," Archer explains, "ignore Rādhā and Krishna and it is rather on Siva and Durga that he lavishes attention." It would seem that like Kamala Das six centuries later, he found the Radha-Krishna relationship a good literary focus through which to express the intensity of the human sexual relationship.

But whether there are some sort of religious implications or not, Das's Radha is not a devotee, but a very human lover.

In context with "the burden of darkness" (as Kohli phrased it) in her other poetry, these two poems may be revealing of the almost paranoid concern Das expresses toward death. Naidu only makes one oblique reference to death, toward the end of "The Flute-Player of Brindaban," and that is more in regard to contrasting heaven ("Indra's golden-flowering groves") to hell ("sad Yama's silent Courts")—the implication is that her devotion is so complete that she would follow him anywhere, and that even the shadowy underworld would be preferable to separation. In contrast, Das's "The Maggots" uses seven references to finality: sunset, last time, left, night, dead, corpse, maggots.

In summation, the four poems reflect the two differing approaches to Krishna—devotee or lover—as well as the polarization in twentieth century Indian poetry. Is death a matter of Indra's paradise and "Yama's silent Courts," or of merely a corpse, nipped by maggots? Does worship and adoration of Krishna eternally fill the devotee's heart with his beauty and his music, or does he merely make love to one for a last time and leave? I suppose it would depend upon whether or not one hears the call of his flute.

#### Notes

- 1. Prabhakar Machwe, "Prominent Women Writers in Indian Literature after Independence," *Journal of South Asian Literature*, XII, Nos. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1977), 146.
- 2. Padmini Sengupta, *Sarojini Naidu: A Biography* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1966); the call number is DS 481 N25 S4. The call number of the volume of her collected poetry, *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1969; first printed 1943) is PR 6027 A53 S4 1969.
- 3. Subhas Chandra Saha, *Modern Indo-Anglian Love Poetry* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1968), p. 24.
- 4. Devindra Kohli, Virgin Whiteness: The Poetry of Kamala Das (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1968), p. 24.
- Love Songs of Vidyāpati, trans. Deben Bhattacharya, ed. with intro., noted and comments, W. G. Archer (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 44.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 35. Of course, Archer's opinion is not beyond dispute; e.g., Edward C. Dimock, Jr., refers to Vidyapati as a Vaisnava in his article "Doctrine and Practice among the Vaisnavas of Bengal," in *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, ed. Milton Singer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 43.

#### R. Raphael (essay date 1979)

SOURCE: Raphael, R. "Kamala Das: The Pity of It." *Indian Literature* 22, no. 3 (1979): 127-37.

[In the following essay, Raphael contends that Das's autobiography, My Story, is flawed but provides insight into the author's personality and work.]

David McCutchion says that Kamala Das, the Indo-English poet, uses the technique of free verse in her poems, the 'originality' and 'freshness' of which arise out of her personality. Roger Iredale says that "In many of the poems of Kamala Das there is an almost violent frankness that expresses itself through an outspoken use of languages as she explores the nuances of the personal relationship." In a review article, K. Ayyappa Panicker says that Kamala Das's poetry deals with a distinctly feminine world, "the intensely domesticated but never tame or tepid world of man and woman." He goes on to say: "In poem after poem there emerges the dark sinewy figure of femininity complaining of the failure of love: a wild shriek of despair fills every room until the walls visibly wobble." Many critics have regarded Kamala Das as a confessional poet because she "has always dealt with private humiliations and sufferings which are the stock themes of confessional poetry." E. V. Ramakrishnan says that the confessional poetry of Kamala Das not only avoids cliches of expression but also every trace of sentimentality and pathos even when dealing with the most intimate personal experiences. 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.

Kamala Das's poems deal with her own personality. "In her poems Kamala Das lays bare her hesitations, failures, ignorance, shame and feelings of guilt since all of them wear the stamp of her personality. There is no attempt to idealize or glorify any part of the self. One of her long poems, 'Composition', embraces such diverse moods as passionate attachment, agonizing guilt, nauseating disgust and inhuman bitterness. In 'Blood', self-questionings and self-assertions intermingle to form the dominant confessional tone. 'The Old Playhouse', 'In Love', and 'Gino' begin with images of deep involvement in the physical act of love. But, soon, these poems slip into images of physical rotting, disgust and sickness, suggested by the poet's awareness of the essential futility of her experience," says E. V. Ramakrishnan.

That brings me directly to the problem of my enquiry, namely, the poetry of Kamala Das derives its value from her personality. The problem is vaguely stated by I. K. Sharma in his review of Devindra Kohli's *Kamala Das* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1975) which appeared in *The Journal of Indian Writing in English* (Vol. I, No. 1, January 1977, pp. 69-70). Sharma complains that Kohli's book does not give us a sufficient picture of the life-story of Kamala Das. The charge is a serious one inasmuch as an understanding of the private life of Kamala Das is an absolute necessity for an understanding of her poetry. However, the task of understanding her life-story is made simple by Kamala Das herself in her autobiography.

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Kamala Das's *My Story* seems to have created some sort of a sensation among the reading public and the controversy with the publisher seems to have contributed much to its publicity. However, anyone who wants to get at the personality of Kamala Das should read this little autobiography.

An author is a public possession, and his or her lifestory, when written sincerely, does fill a social as well as aesthetic function. Besides, critics tell us that the first duty of a good student of literature is to establish a friendly and personal relationship with the author. I am, therefore, perfectly within the pale of aesthetic criticism, when I try to find out for myself if Kamala Das has a personality rich, experienced and mellowed enough to venture upon an autobiography.

It must be noted that not all can write autobiographies. Before writing his or her 'story', the autobiographer must have lived his or her life fully. Every human being leads a twofold existence: the inner or subjective world of meditation, introspection, beliefs and convictions, and the external or objective life of adventures structured in a chronological or historical order. A genuine autobiography should be much more than a book of deeds of externalized adventures; it must also explore the world of inner consciousness. Actions and events taking place within the phenomenal universe have their use, but an autobiographer should also concentrate upon the personal world, and recognize the phenomenological or external world as being important only insofar as it lends significance to the inner world of emotive or spiritual values.

That means that the autobiographer must have lived his life according to certain noble principles and ideals. The struggles and tribulations that such a person encounters in upholding these principles and the joy and satisfaction connected with their achievements alone can make the autobiographer's life worth reading. The autobiographer must, therefore, live not only his or

her private life, but also that of his or her age. My Experiment with Truth is the autobiography of a man who lived 'fully and entirely' not only his private life but also the life of his age: Gandhiji's Experiment will live as long as humanity lives, because mankind has a great fascination for truth; Nirad C. Chaudhuri's Autobiography of an Unknown Indian tells less about himself than about the age in which he lives and the historical forces that made it to be what it is today. Chaudhuri is so alive to his social and cultural environments that his Autobiography remains "a refreshing and many-pronged attack on that nebulous phenomenon called the British Empire in India," says K. Raghavendra Rao.

St. Augustine's *Confessions* is the first completely honest self-analysis in the history of literature. Book XI of the Confessions is pure philosophy. And Augustine was not always a philosopher: he was a pleasure-seeking profligate and a lascivious philanderer, sexually more deviated than Kamala Das. Yet his Confessions lives, not because he narrates his own vices and sins of the flesh but because his life was a quest after perfection. For instance, he sought his salvation in Manichaeism and then wanted to establish himself as a rhetorician. Both these he gave up. Finally, he discovered his real self in Christianity. I am not insinuating that one can discover one's true self only in Christianity: one could equally discover one's self in any religion or in any ideology. The important point is to discover one's self which is neither pure flesh nor pure spirit—because as long as one does not know one's real self, one wallows in ignorance.

Thus, Cardinal Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua is a passionate defence, by the leader of the Oxford Movement, of the roads he took in his chequered march towards Truth. It is the story, once again, of his intellectual development and conversion to Catholicism. The Apologia pro Vita Sua "is among the greatest autobiographies of the world," says George Sampson. W. B. Yeats's autobiography is called A Vision, "and that book is an attempt to let Western civilization, or the mind of the race itself, write its own autobiography; at that period in his life Yeats tried to find in the structure of history the structure of his own personality," says Daniel Albright in the Preface to his book The Myth against Myth.

None of these elements find any place in Kamala Das's *Story*. It is not the story of the unfolding of a great personality. There is no element of quest, spiritual or otherwise, no ideological confrontation. The structure of her *Story* may be analogically spoken of as a passage from ignorance of her flesh to a knowledge of it: at the beginning of her story she felt that she was incapable of enjoying sex and looks suspiciously at her husband who enjoys it. But there soon came a stage when she did learn to enjoy orgasmic pleasure. And