

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE MAMTA KALIA POEMS REFLECTED INTO THE INDIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Mamta Kalia started her impactful literary writing in years of seventies in last century when the portrait of a woman was confined within words 'acceptance' and 'support' which were "secure rings in fires". But today, she is considered among six major contemporary Indian poets in English, viz., Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia and Imtiaz Dharkeer. These all poets represent various significant aspects of contemporary poetic sensibility and their importance is both intrinsic and historical. This paper analyses Mamta Kalia from a feminist angle.

Keywords: Criticism, Feminism, Feminist Movement, Mamta Kalia

Mamta Kalia born on 2nd November 1940 at Vrindavan. She got her education in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Indore. Daughter of a learned father, Mamta Kalia was under influence of his father in preferring literature profession. Mamta Kalia did her post-graduation in English from Delhi University and was Principal of a college in Allahabad for 28 years. Currently she heads Bhartiya Bhasha Parishad at Kolakata. Mamta Kalia started writing at the age of nine and has more than 25 books to her credit including four novels and ten collections of short stories. Her novel *Beghar* was a major success and ran into five editions. She has written a collection of one-act plays, edited several books and is a regular contributor to leading magazines. Mamta Kalia has the unique distinction of writing both in Hindi and English. Her two collections of verse *Tribute to Papa* and other *poems* and *Poems 78* have been particularly appreciated.

Her poems deal with frustrations of a woman's life in and outside the house, boredom of married life and chaos of values in society. Forced living in an appalling environment, including her relationship with her father that was all the time a dominating one, her loneliness in a women's hostel just after marriage, her living with a husband who could not differentiate between love and sex, her survival with all those twelve members of the family who are related to her husband, and so on, has made her voice her anger and dissatisfaction with life. By using irony, she concentrates on the ordinariness of women's life and adopts a confessional tone in her literature to overcome the aggression faced by them in the male-oriented society.

Mamta Kalia feels suffocation in such a society and repents that she is a woman. She is fed up of being a woman. She closely observes and understands them and writes about their experiences. She voices forth the emotional experiences, the cries in the lives of women; the physical and psychological torture experimented by them by using proper diction and technique. Her poetic output is suffused with her wit, irony and feminine sensibility. Hence her poetry is psycho-dynamics. She depicts woman as a struggler and an emergent winner in her writings.

The poetry of Mamta Kalia amalgamates the themes of love, marriage, family life and society where she impresses us for her sharp intellectual quality and autobiographical flavor. It is the poetry concerned with personal matters and relationships, of private fears and dreams which lead to the ultimate resilience in the face of any relationship that threatens to devastate her vital and potential self.

The thematic variety of her poetry stretches from idealism, tradition, culture, politics, love, marriage, family, modernity to society and its various burning issues which demand immediate attention. With a distinctive tone and a view point peculiarly her own, she brings to the fore, the horrid reality of the contemporary life. Autobiographical flavor suffused with a sharp intellectual sensibility lends a unique charm to her writings. Unlike most of the women poets, she exhibits a fair amount of wit in her verse...

Poetic Sensibility and Serving

Mamta Kalia's poetic sensibility is almost exclusively subjective in its response to experience as a beloved and as a serving woman. A large number of poems from the first volume concentrate on the romantic passion of early love while majority of poems from the second volume project the tension of adjusting with the routine of many years of successful love-relationship. She depicts oppression of women with greater self-consciousness, a deeper sense of involvement and often with a note of protest. Despite her literary interest and education she has faced discrimination and obstacles in her life. She is highly ambitious and gifted but due to low self-esteem, self-confidence she gets psychological problems and manic depressions. She struggles with the ardent feminist within her. She goes to embrace the ideology of feminineness that has been indoctrinated into the women of her generation. She conveys the turmoil of feeling in cool, idiomatic and sensitive prose through her writing. Mamta Kalia's poem "*Oh, I'm fed up of being a woman*" pours heart of a woman. The protagonist says that she is fed up of being a woman

"Oh, I'm fed up of being a woman, This all time beware mess of my body"

Mamta Kalia's psychology is discussed further to find out the compulsions which make her to confess everything. Emphasis is all through an evaluation of the relevance and validity of her observation as a confessional poet.

Man-Woman Relationship

Every relationship in her life has however succeeded in intensifying the crisis of disappointment. Filled with a sense of utter disgust and disappointment, she turns to poetry. Instead of fighting, there is a lack of romantic idealism in the experience of love. She wants to present herself in the best of her moods before her husband. Mamta Kalia also exhibits the oppressed position of a woman in marriage. Marriage for a girl means only an exchange of masters first the parents were there, now there will be a husband to control her. As Simone de Beauvoir observes

"There is an unanimous agreement that getting a husband – or in some cases a 'protector' – is for her the most important of undertakings She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile into the hands of a new master"

Mamta Kalia's "*Tribute to Papa*, which is according to 'Eunice De Souza', one of the most compelling poems. She figures out an opposition not only to men's dominance over women but women's acceptance of men's dominance. She shows us the division of two cultures east and west. Mamta Kalia's personal rejection of the non-materialist father however ironic in its tone is a 'tribute' to the contemporary materialistic Father India. No comparable stance has been taken by any women. The poem moves from one offensive statement to another, with supreme indifference to traditional Indian

values. Not only are the father's ideals for the daughter rejected contemptuously, but his normal way of life sneered at". But the poem missed the main figure 'Mother', Mamta Kalia's collection of poems rarely talks about her mother's role in her life. Only one poem 'Brah' deals with the mother theme. The mother daughter relationship is missing. The children also show no gratitude to their mothers when they grow up. This filial relationship adds to the crisis of a woman. Mamta Kalia also presents a very realistic view: "No, I am no pelican to my sons Nor a dove to my love. I am an antibiotic against all infections."

Further, in her poem I Must Write Nicely Now she says You can't adjust with your own children as they come to have their own individuality. Mamta Kalia stands as a representative of Indian women. She speaks for them/she realizes their suffocation. She advocates for their emancipation. Even she instigates to be revengeful if not given rights. If men fail to realize their importance they should discard their society and let them say how they feel.

Crisis of Identity

The frustration and disgust with the existing reality, and the mounting desire for autonomy, forces Mamta Kalia, a noteworthy Indian woman poet, to embark on a quest or a search for an identity. According to Simone de Beauvoir: A woman's personality within her home gives her no autonomy, it is not directly useful to society, it does not open out in the future and it produces nothing. This dissatisfaction results in a sense of nothingness in Mamta Kalia about which she ironically remarks:

"But nothing ever happened to me except two children and two miscarriages."

Her identity is missing. In a poem 'Anonymous' she depicts the stature of a middle class woman. The title of the poem 'Anonymous' means 'without any name'. The poem deals with the psychology of middle class woman, which does not have any specific name. It can be any name. It denotes the whole feminine world. In her poem she says in her very first line

"I no longer feel I'm Mamta Kalia. I'm Kamla Or Vimla Or Kanta or Shanta"

Here the poet wants to say that she has lost her identity after marriage. Before marriage everyone knows her by her name but after marriage she has become a normal house wife (middle class). She does not have any specific name. She is talking about middle class married woman who loses her identity after marriage.

'Life of a woman is very difficult you are bound to adjust everywhere. I really hate the word 'adjust'. But after marriage I had to adjust a lot. When you marry a person you are directly connected to his family also. The motto of relationship is adjustment. Marriage is an adjustment. It is one sided elastic band where a women's patience is stretched.'

The poet laments and says that she is no longer Mamta Kalia. Her routine life has changed her totally. All the time she is busy managing her home, saving and working to meet other expenses properly. The depiction of status of middle class woman is pathetic. They are just unpaid servants. Nobody takes care of them. She has to take care of everybody. Poet wants to show us inner pathos of a woman's life that she has firstly to perform her household duties only then can she ever think of herself. They are so much occupied in their daily routine that they have to forsake their preferences liking and at last identity also. In this patriarchal society it is very difficult for a woman to maintain her own identity. The pressure of kitchen-work and house-hold work becomes a threat to a woman's freedom and individuality.

The Protagonist

The protagonist describes herself as an appendix. She compares herself with the last page of a book or a small tube shaped part which is joined to the intestine on the right side of the body and has no use in human's. Now she has become an 'appendix', a last page of a book or unused part of human body when rotten can take someone's life. Her husband is a book and she is an appendix. A wife's fate is to remain as an 'appendix' in her husband's book of life. A wife's life is so worthless that it is reduced to a note of milk and bread. There is not any emotional bonding between her and her husband. After hearing this she feels all disjointed. She doesn't like to be treated as a mere object of enjoyment, nor as a domesticated servant looking after the husband, kids and kitchen, but as an independent, vivacious individual. A pervasive gloom and loneliness haunt her day in and day out. In her poem *Seize the Day* she expresses the monotony and drudgery of daily routine which seems to end in nothingness:

"Days stubbed in the ash-tray. Days devoid of everything. It is really depressing to live through. Days of dissociation. When meanings are uprooted. And nothing endures"

Mamta Kalia pronounces her grins and grudges by using confessional mode. In *Tribute to Papa* she interrogates even her father for his adherence to customs, traditions and sacraments and complains of the generation gap she feels with him. She has liberal views but at the same time she finds it hard to defy the commandments of her father:

"You suspect I am having a love-affair these days, But you're too shy to have it confirmed. What if my tummy starts showing gradually? And I refuse to have it curtted? But I'll be careful, Papa, Or I know you'll at once think of suicide."

However, problems arise when a woman too starts seeking direction for her. No longer contented with what life doles out, she wants to set her own agenda. It appears perfectly natural that Indian women elevate their voice against the established order and try to affirm their distinct identity by breaking the traditional taboos as to love and sex which is the outcome of male-dominated society.

The poet totally defies the established patriarchal standard imposed upon her father's feelings. It is quite a contrast to feudal times when she owns nothing, woman does not enjoy the dignity of being a person; she herself forms a part of the patrimony of a man: first her father then of her husband. Under the strictly patriarchal regime, the father can from their birth on, condemn to death both male and female children; but in the case of former, society usually limits his power; every normal new born male is allowed to live whereas the custom of exposing girl infants is widespread". She laments about her father's status that he could not make a grand and 'cozy place' for himself so he is an unsuccessful man from the 'worldly point of view. If he had enough guts to 'smuggle eighty thousand watches' then she would proudly tell everyone about her father's import-export business. She asserts that she does not want to be a model. Sort of ideal like her father. She in these lines 'you want me to be like you, Papa' expresses her annoyance over her father idealism. As she states in an interview: I was a rebel like in the sense my parents were very methodical people. I wanted to bite. I wanted to bite everybody. I wanted to express myself in the worst of words. It was very dissatisfactory. As a young girl of 27, I was not happy at all. I had to live a life which I never wanted. Her bitter resentment with the order of things which was expressed during the interview and the bitterness observed in her poetry

exemplify the hot-blooded nature of the feelings that emerge as a distinct feature of the contemporary women's poetry.

Conclusion

Her poetry is a confessional one as she confesses her feeling and experience, guilt and hate, love and lust. It is self-revelatory, poetry of private details. For example, in one of her poems she even doesn't hesitate to articulate her impatience with the social etiquettes, and makes a frank declaration of her desires for natural life. However, this poem has been written in seventies but it has not lost its appeal in the contemporary times. On the contrary, it has become more pertinent and piercing as the prices of all the commodities have been soaring high at the sky-rocketing speed since that time. What to talk of the poor masses, things have gone out of reach from the hands of so-called well-to-do families in the present times. In the last couple of lines, she makes a dig at the changed needs and priorities of people. The poem has a direct, chatty opening, an argumentative progression and a closure marked by a statement of personal resolution. No structural formality has been observed but the redeeming feature is the undercurrent of irony that strengthens the theme of the poem. The syntax is informal and relaxed while the theme is very bold and urbane. In her Tribute to Papa the tribute becomes a pregnant site of generational difference with regard to values, ideals and way of looking at each other and the world around. Mamta Kalia rejects her father's life of limited dreams. She intends to choose her own course and follow her ideals. Ironically, she terms her father to be an unsuccessful man and delineates the clash between the old and new value scales. Women in India have always remained suppressed and oppressed and this has led to confusion in the mind of an Indian woman so much so that she wants to give proof for everything that she says. She is uncertain whether the people surrounding her believe her or not.

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