

## Quest for an Identity in the poems of Mamta Kalia

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The term identity enables us to understand the person, as well as the various roles the person has within each community that she or he is participating in. The concept of identity (as opposed to social identity, or role identity) describes who they are, their feeling, their hopes and desires, their interests, the essence of the person as well as the characteristics of the person. Apart from that where do they stand? What do people perceive about their status? Where do they stand in terms of their *asmita* (existence)? Identity of a woman is still missing; they haven't got their real position in society, so they are in search for real identity or their *asmita*.

We women, who are writing, are really feminist. Feminism in India was good as long as it was movement, but now it is more of a brand focused on liberalization of the body. So the search for an identity of a woman is an 'identity image' that means asserting our identities. It is all about women search for her independence, liberalization and her status of equality. It is search for "asmita" her existence. (Kalia).

Woman's life is full of compromises. She has to make compromises in every walk of life. "Sacrifice thy name is woman" This concept was introduced by the great Hindi poet 'Jai Shanker Prasad' in *Kamayani*. In his poetic utterances he says that womanhood is the ideal, She is an epitome of sacrifice and endurance. She is full of motherly love and her eyes brim over with tears due to great sufferings. It is fatalistic to endorse that a woman's birth is for suffering and enduring. There is no alleviation or escape from it as she is destined to show forbearance. When the woman starts searching her own identity. She is called feminist. Feminism stands for woman's struggle against their continuing circumscribed existence at work, in society and in the culture of the country. Women are set to fight for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by the state, by society and by men. A woman's identity is defined by man's world and it revolves around providing him all comforts. It is an irony. She does not own her own life. There are set rules or norms which dictate her life.

Betty Freidan's, *The Feminine Mystique*, talks about American women's lives in the post war years. Freidan comments, "it is a cliché of our own time that women Betty Freidan's, *The Feminine Mystique*, talks about American women's lives in the post war years. Freidan comments, "it is a cliché of our own time that women spent half a century fighting for 'rights' and the next half wondering whether they wanted them after all. The situation that Freidan describes is where the 'women problem' has not been solved, has not gone away, but what has disappeared is a language of oppression. This lack is what Freidan termed the 'feminine mystique' or, in her opening chapter, the problem has no name.'

"The problem lay buried unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a

yearning that women suffered in the middle of-----  
-----as she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover  
material, ate peanut butter sandwiches -----lay beside her  
husband at night----- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent  
question-Is this all”.(Madsen44)

Freidan identified the real problem of feminine entrapment, the desire for something more than the domestic ideal that was identified with true femininity.

To face the problem is not to solve it .But once a women faces it. ...she begins to find her own answers’. So when she starts thinking about her status. What is her real position in society? Besides being someone’s daughter, wife and mother she is something more .she has her own individual personality, her liking disliking. She has to search her identity. (Madsen44)

There are several Indian women poets writing in English. Mamta Kalia is one of them. Mamta Kalia was born in Mathura. Her grand father was a businessman. Her father was a scholar of Hindi and English. Her uncle late Bharat Bushan Agrawal was a prominent poet of the progressive movement. After spending many years in the teaching profession, her father joined A.I.R<sub>2</sub> and worked as a station director at various places. She had her schooling at Delhi, Bombay, Nagpur and Pune. Her father wanted her to excel and be different. They were two sisters. Her elder sister Pratibha was an executive with I.C.I. Calcutta. But nature gave them dissimilar personalities. Pratibha Kalia was good looking, a dancer, singer and an artist. Mamta Kalia was an ordinary woman but with a deep sensitivity towards life and people.. She met Ravindra Kalia at a seminar in Chandigarh. They very soon decided to get married.

Her books in English are ‘Tribute to Papa’ (1970) and Poems 78 (1978)’. She has written five novels in Hindi, seven short story two one – act play collections, four novelettes for children.

Her husband Ravindra Kalia is an avant grade Hindi writer. He is also a journalist. Now a days he is editing ‘Vagartha’ magazine (Hindi). Her two volumes of English poems were not welcomed by her Hindi readers and friends. They (her friends) say ‘No one reads your bastard English in India’ She took up the challenge to write in Hindi. Her first novel ‘Beggars the homeless’ has sold four editions and is known for shattering the hard core of earlier novels. It attacks the myth of physical virginity.

Her second novel Narak-ka-dwar or Narak-dar-Narak deals with the crisis of a working couple pitted against a heartless social system. Her short stories speak of adjustment problems of the working classes, gender bias and middle class muddles. They depict women as struggler and emerging as winner. Her novel ‘Ek Patni Ke Notes’ deals with the theme of male chauvinism. Her latest novel is ‘Daur’ is based on the theme of modern wasteland and emotional bareness.

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 ness of my body"(Poems 79)

A woman is always cautious about her looks, if she is looking beautiful or not, she is fat or thin. She loves appreciation She has to massage her body to remain young and beautiful because her body is a weapon through which she pleases everyone. She is a thing to please everyone. All the beauty pageants depend upon woman's beautiful body because this show is exclusively related to the female body and its display in various forms and dresses. A woman is a thing of show and everyone gets enjoyment through that But it is a woman's fate that she becomes an object of appeasement no one bothers about her feelings. She gives everything but in place of respect she gets abuses and tortures.

The differences between men and women have been interpreted in various stages of childhood, young girl, married woman, mother and the woman in love in the *Second Sex* by Simone De Beaviour.

In her 'Introduction' she asks 'What is woman' "Tota Mulier in utero" says one 'Woman is a womb – She is a womb an ovary: She is a 'female' the word is sufficient to define her. In the mouth of a man the epithet – female has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature, on the contrary he is proud if someone says of him, 'He is male". The term 'female' is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality but because it imprisons her in her sex .( Beaviour 35).

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman ... Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual **as** an other." (Beaviour 295)

Parents dress their boy and girl in different ways. They buy them different toys and books. They have different codes of behaviour. Boys must not cry, girls must never be seen without underwear. Boys can run, climb trees, girls are asked to be careful. In India there are certain discrimination which parents of poor class start from the very beginning: girls get less food to eat. They are less likely to be sent to school less favoured when it comes to buying new clothes or toys. They prefer male child instead of female.

So Mamta Kalia's poetry reveals acute awareness of the tragic fate which comes with the very fact of being born a woman "A woman has no independent existence, identity or freedom of will and she always exists in relation to others" The poems of Mamta Kalia reveal how a woman in this male dominated society is conditioned into the emotional and cognitive traits of subordination and dependence. The dichotomous attitude which continues to operate throughout a woman's life starts right in her parent's home. She is continuously reminded of her femininity. 'Lakshmi Kannan' was instructed:

'No, no don't run

Don't take long strides

Don't raise your voice

Be a woman, be moderate in everything.(Gupta 139)

As far as the language Mamta Kalia uses is not particularly a poetic diction. It does not appear that she is not only writing a poem but also expressing herself through middle class woman. A woman as a wife is expected to be obedient and faithful to her husband and prove a good mother as far as nourishing of her children is concerned. There is no such established tradition for men.

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.

Another stage of the woman is as a 'married woman' who has no identity. 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 (Souza26)

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.' (kalia).

At last she laments and says

"I am no longer Mamta Kalia"

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. No body 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.

In the poem "Matrimonial Bliss' she express (through her protagonist) that after years of separation she wants to say something to her husband she feels 'poetic'. After years of separation the poet returned to her husband but the question is why she was away for such along time? There may be various reasons. She might have left her husband due to

some conflict; misunderstanding or she was emotionally away from him. “I keep hanging on to you like an appendix...

You obligingly smile

Asking me to keep note of milk and bread” (Papa30)

The protagonist describes herself as an appendix. She compares herself with the last page of 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 humans .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. Her whole image is divided and scattered here and there but

“But the moment I hear your foot steps

I put all of me together

And give you my best smile”. (Papa30)

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” (Beauvoir 352).

There are various stages and complexities of married life. In her poem ‘After eight years of Marriage’ shows us what happens after eight years of marriage. Mamta Kalia is always behind every middle class woman. She very well projects herself through her characters. She usually takes a light theme to depict the mental agony of middle class woman. In poem ‘After eight years of marriage’, she writes about woman’s compulsions. She is not at all satisfied with her marriage and in a large family of the in-laws her future dreams were shattered. When she visited her parents for the first time after eight years of marriage, they asked her whether she was happy, which she thought to be an absurd question, but like an accommodating Indian wife ‘swallowed everything/and shielded a smile of great content’. She describes her personal suffering and believes that traditional large joint family causes trouble which she can never forget.

“That I was happy on Tuesday

I was unhappy on Wednesday

I was happy one day at 8 O’ clock

I was most unhappy by 8.15...

And struggled hard hurting myself’ ...

I swallowed everything

And smiled a smile of great content”(Poems78,26)

Mamta Kalia’s first verse volume titled ‘Tribute to Papa’ opens with

Tribute to papa is an ironical collection. I tried to parody most of the relationships. I was breaking down things. There was a time when I wanted to disown

everything and everybody. So the poems were against established values, established relationships which are served to you on a platter. The first book is a refusal of all that. In the second book, Poems'78', I've sobered down, and moved from individual to social concerns. I felt contradictions in society were more important and more critical than personal contradictions and failures". ( Souza60 The title of the poem 'Tribute to Papa' is quite ironical and satirical as well, Tribute to Papa is a title but there is no tribute, but only revolt against patriarchal establishment Kalia vehemently criticizes her father's values and ideals.

'Who cares for you papa?

Who cares for your clean thought? (Papa9)

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". ( Beauvoir114).

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. This is quite opposite to Freudian theory.

She does not want to be like her father. According to Freud

when a little girl realize that their bodies are different, when they find out that they don't have a penis. This is extremely significant , according to Freud, for this urges them onto a different development path than boy's. For girls , affected by a sense of lack, suffer 'penis envy', and this makes them dislike their mothers ,for, after all ,it is the mother's fault that daughters are like mothers – they do not have a penis. On the other hand , they long to be with and like their fathers".(Geetha73).

Her father wants her to be like Lakshmibai,

Or like Rani Lakshmibai' but she does not want to be like the heroic female warrior like Rani of Jhansi. The comparison of Rani Lakshmibai is very satirical. In actuality a woman who cannot fight to improve her own status. She has to prove her ability and make her presence felt everywhere, she is slave and the Second Sex .As Beauvoir says, "Women has always been man's dependent, if not his slave, the two sexes have never, shared the world in equality".

First she has to liberate herself free from the bonds and restraint imposed upon her by this society then she can fight for some other cause, Rani of Jhansi fought for the cause of independence and died for that but what is the reality? She could not maintain her own identity. Her real name was Manu but after marriage her husband changed her

name and called her Rani Lakshmibai. She lost her name and identity for her husband. A woman becomes great if she sacrifices herself for her husband and children in this man's world. The problem arises when she starts thinking about herself. So Mamta Kalia does not want to be Rani Lakshmibai. She gives two donkey claps for her father's greatness and three for Rani Lakshmibai.

This is a great difference between her and her father's concept. She again says that her father is suspecting her of having a love-affair but he cannot say this to her directly because he feels ashamed of this love affair and pregnancy. There were certain norms of society which were supposed to be followed by young girls. Patriarchy treats woman as an Other and gives her a secondary status. As Simone De Beauvoir writes "Man perceives themselves as self and woman as an other ..... Woman too perceive men as self (as subject) and themselves as an other".

At least the poem closes on a note of concern for the father.

'But I'll be careful papa  
O I know you'll at once  
Think ..... Suicide

This sudden turn is quite painful and challenges social taboos.

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". (Nabar 102)

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 'Brat' deals with the mother theme. The mother daughter relationship is missing.

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.

Mamta Kalia while writing about her poem is not very particular about her diction. She uses the common language. The spoken language, the language of conversation and of talk. She even uses her physical stastics, 'I measured 34-20-34, to make her poem appealing. Her poems touch our mind and heart. We are a while led by her poems and cannot but agree with her. She writes in free verse but there is a flow in it; a poetic flow we may say, this is a quality of a hero that she has made free verse so smooth running like blank verse.

Kalia thus captures the destructive influence of household drudgery in her beautiful world of poetry and imagination. Her mother-in-law made her work all day long with little food and whipped her every night until her pretty skin turned ugly. Whether within the frame work of the house or outside, the woman remains always marginalized by the dominating

male. A woman is not allowed to participate in an intellectual activity as she is looked upon as inferior

No other voice in Indian literature could ever revolt with such fury and frankness as has been sounded in Kalia's poems against traditions and conventions. Kalia's poetic persona represents the quite essential woman in her manifold aspects, rebelling against what is, with an underlying remainder of what should be, true of humanity. In her poetry there is an unceasing restlessness, which in effect turns out to be an inconsolable cry of the occasion; When a sense of self-pity attends such a cry, her poetry becomes a vibrant symbolic gesture of showing a rebellious will to fight out for a cause. She fights for a world that is free from discriminative value systems, hypocrisies and prejudiced laws. Kalia is a subjective poet distilling into the pages of her poetry the experience of a woman in different roles – as a beloved, as a wife, as a housewife etc. Her poetic output is impregnated by her wit and feminine sensibility. She is very straight forward. She takes up cudgels against the world through her writings.

So Kalia's poetry embodies the agony of women emerging from the state of subjugation and bondage 'She seeks to establish their identity and be accorded a place of dignity the self.

"Life of a woman is very difficult especially for modern woman, where there are so many responsibilities for her. There are so many rubbish works for women as house keeping and chores that are really tiresome. And, ultimately nobody realize your worth, but when you are a writer you are free from all the responsibilities so I am satisfied as a writer because at that time you are nobody but a writer. So I sneak time to write, I don't want to be a defeated person, I am a woman who always want to win everywhere." (Kalia)

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