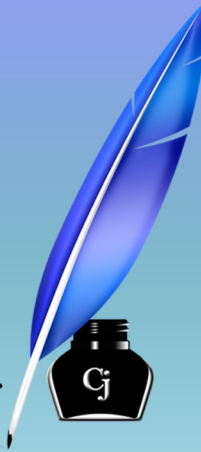


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## Mamta Kalia: The Voice of Indian Middle Class Women

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Mamta Kalia (b.1940) is a significant post Kamala Das voice. Although as subjective as Kamala Das in her frequent use of the 'I', the assertive self in her transcends the romantic agony of Das in favour of a more ironic mode. She has written only two collections of poetry in English *Tribute to Papa And Other Poems* (1970), and *Poems'78* (1978) in which she exposes ruthlessly, the oppression of Indian middle-class women in their families, married life and at large by the male-dominated culture, which is not only social and cultural, but psychological as well. Her main preoccupation is the boredom of various human-relationships, failures and frustrations of married life, indifference faced by women inside and outside their homes and some mind boggling social issues. Her poetry also exposes the patriarchal setup of the Indian society in which a woman is not secure even today. She portrays the conflicts between traditional structures and an emerging female 'I' which gave rise to a different female aesthetic in modern Indian poetry in English. We have lost a voice in Indian English poetry as she has switched over to Hindi and never turned back to English again.

Mamta Kalia (b.1940), a bilingual writer, writes both in Hindi and English and has published only two collections of poetry in English, *Tribute To Papa* (1970) and *Poems'78* (1979). But she has left a mark in modern Indian poetry in English. In her poetry she mainly deals with themes like love, marriage, social and family relationships and the degeneration of human values in modern society. She depicts, through her poetry, a sensitive and intellectual woman's predicament in relation to her parents, family, domestic and professional life and the large outer social life. She also articulates the psychic frustrations and compulsions of love and marriage:

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. (Bajaj,1996:19)

As an Indian woman poet, she is conscious of her identity in the traditional Indian society and raises her voice against the oppression of women with a great sense of vigour and involvement. Her poetry is highly autobiographical in content as her early life with a dominant father, a loveless relationship with her husband and his family and humiliation in her professional life develop her anger and a sense of revolt against the repressive patriarchy under which she is victimized and defeated. So her poetry accordingly depicts the agonies of women in the Indian patriarchal tradition which is largely due to subjugation and bondage under male culture. Her poetry shows a rebellious will to fight for the cause of women and demands a world free from discriminative values, hypocrisies and prejudiced rules. She also struggles for the establishment of women's identity in the contemporary world.

Mamta Kalia is no strident, feminist activist .... Yet her poetry shares a vital concern with the basic proposition of women's demands for an equitable life. She has not only the passion for individuality but also supports the feminist agenda for liberation from patriarchal oppression, and other limitations. (Vashishth, 2010: 149)

She is one of the significant poets of the new generation poets like Kamala Das, Eunice De Souza, Gauri Deshpande et al who "delineate the social predicament, religious barriers

and its restrictions on women.” (Subhashini,2008:85) She presents the image of Indian middle class women freely as expressed by Kamala Das and the ability to remain true in presenting reality provides originality and freshness to her poems. She revolts against the traditions and conventions of Indian society with such fury and frankness as was never witnessed before in Indian English literature. In this connection Bruce King comments:

The present contemporary manner appears to have been initiated by Mamta Kalia who explored the themes, attitudes, voices and registers of speech which have been taken further by de Souza and Silgado. (King, 2001:155)

She depicts through her poetry the experience of a woman in different roles- as daughter, beloved, housewife, mother and as an employer etc with a colour of realism. Her poems do not only reflect her own ideas and experiences but give voice to the agony of an average Indian middle-class woman who is exploited ruthlessly by the hypocrisy of men. Kalia is very dissatisfied with the present Indian tradition, full of social and political corruption, familial disappointments and deterioration of human values which are largely responsible for the psychological and emotional crises of women. Her personality is torn between “two worlds- of tradition and modernity, freedom and bondage, domesticity and professionalism...” (Vashishth, 2010:142-57). She exposes all the discriminations against women by using a simple style and colloquial language.

As far as poetic technique is concerned, she uses irony, sarcasm, and a confessional mode to express her feelings and desires through her poetry. Her frequent use of irony makes her distinct from other women poets of her age and she uses it as a weapon to fight against the oppression of women in the Indian patriarchal society. In an interview with Tanu Gupta, she comments on her use of irony:

The only way of writing is that you wear some extra nails or extra fangs or tusks only then you can be read. Nowadays people require ampicillin for cold and cough, ginger is no longer effective. The same is the case with language. You have to evolve your own diction and language as you have to work on content. (Gupta,2010: 134)

With the help of irony, poetry becomes effective and she forcefully registers her anger, and discontent against the repressive norms of society.

Her treatment of the orthodoxy of tradition in her two poetic volumes is significant. She says herself about her poetry:

*Tribute To Papa* is an ironical collection. I tried to parody most of the relationships. I was breaking down things.....so the poems were against established values, established relationships which are taken for granted. Some of these relationships 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. Society is still full of so many contradictions. Women are burnt and raped. Dowry demands still exist. Instead of talking about post-modernism we should talk about post-barbarism. Much needs to be done with the pen. (Kalia,1999:60)

Her first volume *Tribute To Papa And Other Poems* (1970) is ironic in tone and autobiographical in content. Through it, she gives vent to her inner conflicts and experiences. Her title poem, “Tribute To Papa” depicts the clash between her ideas and those of her father. The father is an upholder of traditional values and wants his daughter to follow the same- but the daughter in an act of open revolt discards all the sanctities of life and is more fascinated with modern life. As she says:

Who cares for you papa?

Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?

Who wants to be an angel like you? (pg 9 TTPOP)

The daughter questions the authority and concerns of the father in her upbringing. She is in the words of Virginia Woolf, “killing the Angel in the house” (Woolf, 1929). She criticizes her father as an ‘unsuccessful man’ who could not provide her a luxurious life due to his self-righteous moral values. She challenges her father that in the modern world there is no room for his traditional values and prayers and rejects his didacticism: “I wish you had guts, papa / to smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke.” (pg 9 TTPOP) She does not mind defying the ideals of her father in order to be happy. In the modern world, prayers are considered as concealment for inactiveness and lack of aptitude of a person. She interrogates and rejects her father’s idealism and sanctimony as his inability and weakness:

When you can’t think of doing anything  
You start praying,  
Spending useless hours at the temple. (pg 9 TTPOP)

She terms prayers as useless to which a person resorts when he/she is not able to do anything. Mamta Kalia in the poem represents a modern, frank, awakened woman who dares to question, judge and even revolt against her father and his values. She wants a change in the traditional values and beliefs and is bold enough to speak against the repressive patriarchal values and laws. The title of the poem is highly ironic as the poem discards the imposition of patriarchal values and ideals. Mamta Kalia seems to be frustrated and depressed at the same time dissatisfied with the given social order. So in her poems there is a cry and an inner desire to transform this society, which is denied to her, so leaves her perplexed and baffled resulted in schizophrenic behaviour in her poems. As: “‘Tribute To Papa’ is a veiled angry poem schizoid in content, a cry..... and a disowning of parentage.” (Prasad,nd:online). So due to her schizoid (mentally abnormal) behaviour, her revolt goes to the extent of disowning her father:

These days I am seriously thinking of disowning you, papa  
You and your sacredness. (pg 9 TTPOP)

These lines depict her as a serious critic of patriarchy. Because of her anti-patriarchal tone, her poetry is considered stronger than Sylvia Plath’s poetry, who wrote, like Kalia, about her relationship and experiences with her father in her most confessional poem “Daddy”. Plath, in order to establish an oppressor- oppressed relationship between her and her father, portrays her father as a German Nazi and herself as a Jew in the poem. Plath is at conflict with her father since for thirty years she has been abiding by the Mosaic law which is also the law of the father (patriarchy). But now she announces, “Daddy I have had to kill you.”(Plath,1981:222) Both poet-daughters feel the need/necessity to exorcise the ‘father’ from their consciousness. Like Kalia she is ready to disown her father and is no longer that woman who lived in her father’s “black shoe.” Both poems “Tribute To Papa” and “Daddy” are about the struggles for autonomy and independence by the daughter-speakers.

Kalia’s frankness leads to an open defiance – “everything about you clashes with merely everything about me” (pg 9 TTPOP) In the same poem, she even does not hesitate to speak about her love affair in an unconventional way. She believes in free sex and does not care for morality:

What if my tummy starts showing gradually  
And I refuse to have it curretted? (pg 9 TTPOP)

In the Indian middle class society, daughters have a great ‘responsibility’ for honouring the family values and any wrong step by them can dishonour the whole family. In a patriarchal culture daughters are emotionally compelled to sacrifice their feelings and emotions for the sake of the family. So Kalia ends the poem with an ironic cautious note as:

But I’ll be careful, papa  
Or I know you’ll at once think of suicide. (pg 9 TTPOP)

While Sylvia Plath in “Daddy” moves from desiring her father, fearing him to hating him and at the end is successful in ending all her relations and dealings with father, with this final retort, “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through.” (Plath,1981:223) She then becomes the author of her own destiny at last, taking over discursive control after exorcising the father figure. However, Mamta Kalia differs from Plath in this regard and at the end submits to the wishes of her father.

Kalia gives an ironic treatment to the institution of marriage which turns a young bride old before age so that she sleeps with a ‘headache’ and wakes up with a ‘backache’. The condition becomes more pathetic when the husband is not able to acknowledge her talents and even sacrifices made by her:

Love made a housewife out of me  
I came with a degree in textile designing  
I skill in debates, dramatics and games  
You don’t realise  
You don’t sympathise. (pg 20 P-78)

Sacrifice, submission and endurance are demanded from a woman in the Indian middle class families, often leading a repressed and depressed condition.

After marriage, women are compelled to live a life of double-standards. Through “After Eight Years Of Marriage” Kalia writes how a woman lives a life of hypocrisy for when her parents inquire about her married life, she gives a ‘smile of great content’ as she doesn’t want to hurt her parents by narrating the miseries of living in a joint family. The poem puts it poignantly:

I want to tell them how I wept in bed all night once  
And struggled hard from hurting myself.  
That it was not easy to be happy in a family of twelve  
..... I swallowed everything  
And smiled a smile of great content. (pg 26 P-78)

So like an ‘obedient’ and ‘accommodating’ Indian wife she ‘swallows’ everything. To ask such a question to a married woman in Indian society is absurd “I should have laughed at it”, she says, because everybody witnesses the tragic predicament of women after being married. “Instead I cried/ and in between sobs, nodded yes.” (pg 26 P-78) A woman’s life gets complicated in a patriarchal society as she has to maintain her smile while her heart sobs.

The same thought is carried out in “Matrimonial Bliss”. Kalia brings out the compulsions under which a woman is forced to spend her life, the superficiality of living with a husband with whom she has a relationship devoid of love and understanding, feeling separated while together. There is nobody to share her feelings, she feels lonely but pretends to be happy in order to please her husband.

I feel all disjoined inside,  
But the moment I hear your footsteps,  
I put all of me together  
And give you my best smile. (pg 30 TTPOP)

She is confused and depressed with regard to love and matrimony. Kalia presents how she is subjugated internally by the patriarchal society against her will and desire. So although she is in misery and broken totally from inside, she still waits ‘anxiously’ for her husband. She is willing to suffer only to please her man. Thus she presents the predicament of a woman as, “I keep hanging on to you like an appendix/ but you, don’t mind”. (pg 30 TTPOP) In the poem she presents a typical Indian tradition where women are forced to show concern more for their domestic bliss and completely ignore their personal problems and miseries.

According to some feminists, marriage is a social institution through which a woman is exploited physically, mentally and psychologically as it is a weapon by which patriarchy is

maintained. Women are often trapped in loveless marriages. Mamta Kalia depicts the agony and misery experienced by women eternally through marriage in several of her poems, and is in open revolt against traditional marriages. "I Am A Great Fool" presents Kalia's loss of faith in matrimonial relationships. Marriage seems to her destructive and hazardous as it snatches away love from her life.

I am a great fool  
To think that marriage is bliss  
Was it last month or last year  
That we exchanged a kiss (pg 8 P-78)

It seems that she had romantic notions about marriage as the involvement of one's whole being (head, heart, body and mind) before actually getting married. But she realises that she was living in a fool's paradise as marriage brought some ugly experiences for her. So she develops a rebellious/bitter attitude towards marriage. Another poem, "They Made Love" reflects a complete lack of feeling and emotion in marital life. There is no romantic sensation between a husband and wife but only physical consummation:

They made love / and ate sandwiches  
And looked at each other's face ---  
Two empty cans. (pg 16 P-78)

For women there is no pleasure and enjoyment even in sex. They exhibit a mechanical behaviour during love-making. Her relationship with her husband is so cold and devoid of love and understanding that in desperation she cries out:

Let's not come close during intercourse  
But mark a distance,  
Touch each other like dead-wire  
And react like fools. (pg 11 P-78)

The poem "Come" also captures the lovelessness and ennui of married life and what keeps them together for a moment is 'skin's lazy hungers' as Kamala Das termed it. Kalia in "I Must Write Nicely Now" expresses her anger and anguish against her arrogant and self-centred husband:

Rejection, dejection, Erection,.....  
Except yourself/ You feel everything is fake. (pg 18 P-78)

She exposes the cruelty of men towards their wives also in poems like, "I'm Not Afraid Of A Naked Truth"

I'm not afraid of a naked truth  
Or a naked knife or a naked drain....  
In fact I am very much afraid of a naked man. (pg 9 P-78)

If there is anything in the world she fears is only the 'man' and his oppression of women. A woman submits herself completely to the will of man and in return he jilts her at any stage of life without any reason. So Kalia "is disaffection with the behaviour of males in Indian societies." (Arana, 2008:241) Kalia also exposes unfaithfulness of a husband:

She worshipped the shivalinga all her life  
and spurned her husband in bed....  
She fought against defilement at every step  
And her husband eloped with her sister in march.  
(pg 17 P-78)

A wife is bound to devote her life to her husband while her husband doesn't care and betrays her when she is in need of his company. So Kalia develops a loss of faith in human-relationships and expresses it in "It was Faith":

It was faith / that I had in you  
It is faith / that I have in no one now. (pg 9 P-78)

Mamta Kalia’s “Dubious Lovers” further shatters romantic notions of love. Her views are that traditional Indian marriages lead to the death of love as the routine course of domesticity and household engagements doesn’t provide time for love and romance. So at times while she longs for the company of her husband, they are ultimately puzzled over what to talk about as:

We look at each other sheepishly  
badly needing something to talk about. (pg 19 TTPOP)

In Indian societies, married life has nothing to offer but boredom, anxieties and only responsibilities and duties. Kamala Das also through her poetry presents a tortured woman who pleads for understanding and compassion from her husband. So there is Mamta Kalia, too, in frustration grilling her husband:

you insist on your presence/ and I am conscious of it/  
as I am of a burning in my rectum/ or of a hair on my chin.  
(pg 19 TTPOP)

Like Das, she is blunt and doesn’t hesitate to use corporal images such as “burning in my rectum”, “hair on my chin”, and “I open my mouth”.

Instead of Love and understanding between husband and wife there is only compromise and adjustment. Kalia mentions some frequent unavoidable quarrels in Indian marriages as:

Every time I open my mouth  
You feel let down,  
And every time you discuss your pay scale,  
I try hard not to frown  
If this goes on where will we end?  
Or have we ended before we have begun? (pg 19 TTPOP)

The drudgery of day-to-day household chores imposed on women takes away love from married life. She indicates through “I Feel Like Crying All The Time” that marriage is no more a sweet relationship but a trap full of endless pain for a woman.

I feel like crying all the time  
.....  
I hate these people around  
Related to me  
Just because they were born  
To my husband’s mother’s brother’s daughter.  
(pg 19 p-78)

The poem analyses the disgust brought out by marriages in Indian societies where marriage does not involve developing a love-relation with one’s husband but marrying as if with the whole family and everyone related to the husband. In a joint family, a daughter-in-law is supposed to sacrifice her own wishes and dreams for the sake of her family. She has to shrink her own self in order to make her family happy. She is expected to obey everybody at her in-laws. In the poem, there is a revolt against such conventional relations and a cry for independence.

I want to smash a glass early in the morning  
and wake up everybody with a start” (pg 19 P-78)

She is bored by these love-less relationships and is disgusted by people around her; even by her husband who, she says: “scowls at/ every word I speak.” (pg 19 p-78)

In another poem “Love Made A Housewife Out Of Me” the poet feels depressed by the every-day household chores which is a threat to the freedom and individuality of a woman. Kalia captures the destructive influence of household drudgery on one’s life and even on her artistic creativity as she herself confesses:

I like to write at a time when my feelings are at my fingertips, but all my routine job takes away the fire.” (Kalia,1999:64)

So the poem presents a view which could be termed as ‘oppression by domestication’ as:

Unmade beds, dirty linen  
Papers long folded, slippers thrown,  
.....  
A sinkful of plates  
And a head full of ache. (pg 20 P-78)

The same thought is expressed by Kamala Das in “An Introduction”, which reveals the demands made by patriarchal society from her as, “dress in saree, be girl, / Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook, / be a quarreller with servants. Fit in....” (Das, 1973:26). Domestication is regarded as the best way to keep a woman subordinate and subservient to men. So both the poets raise their voice against this social menace in an ironic tone.

The loss of one’s identity is often another form of estrangement that a woman feels under a repressive patriarchal system. Kalia highlights this problem through a number of poems. She gives vent to her identity crises in “Anonymous”:

I no longer feel I am Mamta Kalia  
I’m Kamala / or Vimla / or Kanta or Shanta  
(Kalia, 1997:26)

She criticises the roles of traditional housewives as they lose their identity after turning into traditional house-wives and are reduced to mere house-maids who have nothing to do but:

I cook, I wash / I bear, I rear / I nag, I wag /  
I sulk, I sag /and feel happy”. (Kalia,1997:26)

Kalia is dissatisfied with her life and expresses her anger at the loss of her individuality and identity. As a woman, she faces discrimination, obstacles and humiliation in every sphere of her life, despite having a good education. She reflects:

Instead of fighting, I start writing. People around you always try to fit you into a frame – parents, peers and partners.....I snapped myself into two bits like a pod. One bit was obeying, towing and rowing; the other raised its head well past midnight and scribbled away in dairies, on the back of envelopes, on office file covers. (Kalia, 1999:58-59)

This is the condition of every average Indian housewife. So Kalia represents the collective women and gives voice to their feelings in general. In “Tribute To Papa” Kalia creates her own identity by rejecting her father’s notion of “greatness” and “Indian womanhood” who are ready to die for the sake of their sons as:

You want me to be like you, papa  
Or like Rani Lakshmbai  
You’re not sure what greatness is  
But you want me to be great. (pg 9 TTPOP)

Her poem “Inside Out” depicts the contradictions of a female soul in the Indian culture, where a woman, in order to assert an identity is changed into several roles:

I feel / some parts of me are gathering fire  
And some parts, ice/ A part of me is a jackal  
A part of me is an ass / A part of me is a swan.  
(Pg 13 TTPOP)

Most poets use imagery of different natural objects such as animals, birds, flowers, rivers etc as it creates a magic effect in the poem when comprehended. It is used more symbolically, so that a poem extends beyond its literal meaning and becomes more semantic and connotative. Kalia also uses animal imagery in order to reveal her nature and character. At times her behaviour is very cordial and gentle like a dove but at other situations she has to behave very cunningly like a Jackal and sometimes as if very foolish like an ass. She has so

many contradictory roles to play that her real-self is lost. There is no constant identity for her but she feels a permanent identity crisis.

A woman is not spared even in her professional career and is exhausted and humiliated especially working under males. Kalia reflects the frustrations and dilemmas of the educated-urban working women through her poems. In the poem “How Like A Fool” Kalia depicts how a woman has to make compromises and adjustments in a male-dominated culture between the tedium of household and work-place.

How like a fool I have been working all along  
When work is work’s own defeat  
My promotion waits on your naughty knees  
Readiness is all I now need. (pg 15 p-78)

In the above poem, a sense of humiliation and exploitation is indicated. Kalia also exposes the sexual exploitation women experience under a male boss. According to Simon De Beauvoir:

A woman is not allowed to do something positive in her work and in consequence win recognition as a complete person. However respected she may be she is subordinate, secondary and parasitic. (De Beauvoir,1984: 475)

The same idea is put forth in “Tit For Tat” where Kalia depicts the obedience and subordination to a male boss. But this subordination enrages her and she expresses her anger thus:

I’ll hit you! / I’ll tear you up  
.....  
No, I won’t kill you all at once  
You don’t kill me that way either. (pg 16 TTPOP)

Kalia’s woman wants to avenge her male boss for his misdeeds. She breaks the age-old silence imposed by patriarchy:

Let you taste the whole of death gradually,  
As I tasted it for twenty three years.  
You made me kneel / For insignificant things;  
.....  
You made a cipher out of me (pg 16 TTPOP)

But she is forced to make compromises with the patriarchal laws even in her professional career. Kalia says:

But I didn’t / instead, I whispered, “thank you, sir”  
And came out. (pg 16 TTPOP)

She is not dumb but challenges her boss to meet her outside the safe custody of office so that, “we’ll have it all evened up”. According to Patnaik:

Kalia’s poetic persona represents the quintessential woman in her manifold aspects, rebelling against what is, with an underlying reminder of what should be true of humanity. In her poetry, there is an unceasing content of restlessness. (Patnaik 2009:online)

During the 1970’s, some feminists like Betty Friedan demanded liberation from entrapment within the domestic sphere as it becomes a hurdle in their pursuing of public careers. Mamta Kalia also considers the role of housewife and a mother devoting all her time to raising children and serving her man as a major obstacle in the development of her career. So through “No I’m No Pelican To My Sons” Kalia denies the sacrificial role bestowed on a woman and does not show any, “confirmative attitude to patriarchal powers.” (Bhattacharya,1991:161). The poem is about the attitude of women like Kalia towards their relation and how women criticize and acknowledge their bond with their children and husband. In a traditional Indian society, the role of a woman is never counted. She is always

expected to be submissive, humble and docile and is always crushed between household responsibilities and duties towards different family members. So a woman lives in the “concentration camp” as Betty Friedan famously called. But Kalia revolts against it:

No, / I'm no pelican to my sons  
Nor a dove to my love. (pg 8 P-78)

Here, the Pelican symbolises self-sacrifice and the dove tenderness. So she is not going to play a sacrificial role for her sons or husband; she is not a pelican who will feed her offsprings on her blood and be happy to be, “An antibiotic against all infections” and “a shot in the arm of the family.” (Pg 8, p-78) She doesn't feel proud of her creativity for producing sons but considers it one of the painful activities in a woman's life. As opposed to it Helene Cixous narrated in *Coming to Writing*:

Writing as if I had the urge to go on enjoying, to feel, to push, to feel the force of my muscles, and my harmony, to be pregnant and at the same time to give myself the joys of parturition, the joys of both the mother and the child. To give birth to myself and to nurse myself. Life summons life. Pleasure seeks renewal. (Tendon, 2008:89)

As compared with Mamta Kalia, Sylvia Plath also gives importance to things she created including her children as she says, “I will write until I begin to speak my deep self, and then have children, and speak still deeper.” (Plath,1982:166) and also “I must first conquer my writing and experience and then will deserve to conquer childbirth.” (Plath,1982:240) Unlike Kalia, child birth is not a painful activity of a woman's life to Plath, but an enriching force and a gift from nature.

Kalia also depicts the harsh realities of contemporary Indian society and mocks them in several of her poems:

She has dared to speak out the minds and pronouncing the anxieties, agonies and angers in high brazen tones about her in reference to Indian women. (Vashishth,2010:143)

In the poem, “Sheer Good Luck” she uses a direct and sarcastic tone to criticize social norms. She presents the silent sufferings of women in a male-dominated Indian society in which a woman is not secure and is always in a state of threat and any accident is possible to her in this situation:

So many things/ could have happened to me  
I could have been kidnapped/ at the age of seven  
And ravaged by/ dirty minded middle-aged men.  
I could have been married off/ to a man with a bad  
smell.....  
I could have been/ an illiterate woman  
Putting thumb-prints. (pg 11 TTPOP)

In a single poem, she turns our attention to so many social issues and crimes against women like kidnapping, rape, early marriages, illiteracy and domestic violations. At the end, she adds an ironic remark:

But nothing ever happened to me  
Except two children  
And two miscarriages. (pg 11 TTPOP)

She exposes the exploitation of women both mentally and physically by men. She has been accredited for initiating a wave of women's vernacular poetry with its “stripped down style, street language and forcefulness.” (King,2001:155)

The same thought is captured in “Against Robert Frost” which is a short, ironic and witty poem written against Robert Frost's, “After Apple Picking” in which Frost enjoys the event of apple picking whereas Kalia brings out the pathetic condition of women in Indian culture who could not afford an apple:

Whatever we save we keep for beer  
And contraceptives.                      (pg 21 TTPOP)

The poem thus captures the hard and unromantic lives of women and their everyday problems in the middle class urban Indian societies. To be born as a female is itself considered a shame and a sin in Indian society and it brings no happiness for the parents. Kalia reflects this situation in "Brat":

Looking at my navel / I'm reminded of you,  
Mamma You, perhaps, were hardly proud  
Of your creativity.....                      (pg 20 TTPOP)

The mother is not happy that she has given birth to a female child and is sure to be condemned for it and if the child would not have looked like the father, several fingers would have been pointed at her and she would have faced the wrath of both family and society. So the only sigh of relief for the mother is that:

I looked like papa/ and not like the neighbour /  
who shared our bathroom". (pg 20 TTPOP)

This is an ironic note made at the end. Another poem, "Self-Pity" depicts the pathetic condition of women in Indian culture where nobody seems to care for them when in need. A pitiable image is evoked where nobody comes forward to help a miserable woman.

Who will come and ask,  
"Are you tired? Are you hungry?"

-----  
In this large unfriendly town  
Who will say, "Don't Cry"                      (pg 31 TTPOP)

Virginia Woolf narrates in *A Room Of One's own*, "A woman is of highest importance imaginatively; however, she is completely insignificant practically." Indian culture is similar where everybody ignores a helpless and needy woman, although woman is worshipped in the form of Kali, Durga, Sita etc.

Like Kamala Das, Kalia expresses her desire to defy the social restrictions imposed on her. In "Compulsions" she revolts against social norms and "probes into the desire to seek the depth of the real" (Shahane,1971:738) which is denied to her in a patriarchal society. Her resentment against patriarchal society is so strong and forceful that in rebellion, she goes to the extent of shedding her womanliness and declares:

I want to pick my nose  
In a public place  
I want to sit in my office chair  
With my feet up.                      (Pg 12 TTPOP)

While Kamala Das desires to live in non-domestic ways and expose the social and cultural constructions of ideas about femininity in "An Introduction" and gets offended at taking orders of her family and in revolt sheds off her female qualities by wearing a 'shirt' and her 'brother's trousers' and cut her hair like men, Kalia expresses the limitations put forth on women by 'categorizers' of the male society and so wants to cross those limitations. She rejects all standards set by the male oriented society and wants to reveal her own self and identity with a sense of freedom:

I want to pay Sunday visits  
Totally undressed.....  
I want to reveal/ my real age.                      (pg 12 TTPOP)

This reaction is not an impulsive one but a natural revolt against age-old repressive norms of society put forth by men. Restrictions are imposed on women and they are not allowed to live their lives according to their own wishes and needs in such societies. So the poet has a rebellious desire for natural life.

When Kalia finds no other means to fight against the oppressions of men, she moves towards writing. She finds writing a medium for her emancipation and tries to get rid of her inner conflicts through it. She expresses her feelings in, "In My Hour Of Discontent":

In my hour of discontent / I neither shout nor rant  
I simply fill ink in my pen / And spill it with intent.

(Pg 17 P-78)

But she has to be very cautious and self-restrained while writing or she will be dealt with severe punishment by patriarchal society. The irony is expressed by Kalia in following lines:

Using my pen like sword  
Creating at best only verbal discord. (Pg 17 P-78)

Mamta Kalia expressed in a personal interview:

Creative expression is a lone man's battle against the enormous uncertainty of this universe. ....I may not be able to transform the world but I can certainly make them see through my minus-three eye sight..... the hope of being heard and read always exists. (Kalia,1999:63-64)

So she retains the hope that through her writing she may change the traditional ideology against women constructed by patriarchal forces so that this place will become a better place for women. So to conclude with her poem "I write":

I write  
Because I cannot bite.  
It's the way  
The weak ones fight. (pg 15 P-78)

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