
Contemporary Women's Poetry and Anamika: A Study of *Khurduri Hatheliya*

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Article Received: 22/01/2024

Article Accepted: 20/02/2024

Published Online: 22/02/2024

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2024.6.2.125

Abstract:

As a political and literary movement, feminism is not a recent phenomenon. The journey that started with Mary Wollstonecraft has achieved milestones, and by now, activists and scholars have gained a lot for the improvement of women's lot. However, the condition of women, especially in the Third World, remains miserable. To reach the grassroots level, feminist scholars believe that this is the high time that these movements need to be nativized, and the local issues and their solutions require serious consideration. In the home-grown generation of activists and scholars, Anamika has been perhaps one of the most important feminist poets in contemporary India. New metaphors and images mark her depiction of women, and the treatment of language is different. The present paper will discuss the portrayal of women in one of her poetic collections, *Khurduri Hatheliya* (2009).

Keywords: Feminism, working women, violence, imagery, patriarchy and discrimination

Born and raised in Bihar, Anamika is an established name in Hindi literature. Her inclination towards poetry and writing can be located in her family itself. Her father, Shyamnandan Kishore, a renowned poet, has inspired her. She has won several awards, including the Rashtra Bhasha Parishad Award, Bharat Bhushan Aggarwal Award (1996), Sahityakar Samman (1998), and recently, in the year 2020, she was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for Hindi poetry. "The Sahitya Akademi award," the web portal *Feminism in India* declares, "is a symbolic acceptance of the women's experiences, ordinary as well as extra-ordinary, expressed in poignant and vibrant verse, into the canon of acceptable subject for the high art of poetry. Women's writing has always merged the political and the personal." Anamika has been a prolific writer across various genres. Besides poetry, she is a great novelist, critic, and activist. "Whether it is poetry, fiction or feminist

agenda and discussion," writes Abhishek Kashyap in the foreword of his edited book *Anamika: Ek Mulyankan*, "in all her creations, Anamika has stood up as a polite yet firm activist. She has the political understanding of taking her creative output beyond the limitations of Hindi Literature because she knows- 'At the end, all the in-depth issues of our life are viciously political in approach" (5).

Khurduri Hatheliya (2009) is a notable poetic work by the famous Hindi poet Anamika. Here she talks about the position and existence of women in society, how they are being treated and what kind of rights are given to them by the patriarchal society. The poems written by her depict the closest expression of Indian lady. She writes:

सुना गया हमको/यों ही उड़ते मन से/जैसे सुने जाते हैं फ़िल्मी गाने/सस्ते कैसेटों पर/ठसाठसस ठुंसी हुई बस में !/भोगा गया हमको/बहुत दूर के रिश्तेदारों के दुख की तरह/एक दिन हमने कहा-/हम भी इंसान हैं/हमें कायदे से पढ़ो एक-एक अक्षर/जैसे पढ़ा होगा बी.ए. के बाद/नौकरी का पहला विज्ञापन (Anamika 13-14)।

Like in a crowded bus, nobody pays attention to Bollywood songs (played by the driver), or no one is interested. She compared this disturbing situation with the harsh reality of women's lives in the same way nobody is concerned about them. Their feelings and presence are of very little importance, just like we do not ponder the sorrows of distant relatives. They are looked upon as useless creatures, which are given momentary importance. Society has always been ignorant not just about their rights but also when it comes to their mental health and emotional states. Here, the poet urges us to carefully read and pay attention to them. The first thing is that patriarchal society does not allow her to step out from home. If she does and follows her passion, then she is being dragged by society. The poet highlights how society criticizes that kind of courageous woman and puts all efforts into feeling her guilt. It is a lesson for girls who try to break social norms.

इतना सुनना था कि अधर में लटकती हुई/एक अदृश्य टहनी से/टिड्डियाँ उड़ीं और रंगीन अफ़वाहें/चींखती हुई चीं-चीं/दुश्चरित्र महिलाएं, दुश्चरित्र महिलाएं-/किन्हीं सरपरस्तों के दम पर फूली फैलीं/अगरधत्त जंगल लताएं!/खाती-पीती, सुख से ऊबीं/और बेकार बेचैन, अवारा महिलाओं का ही/शगल हैं ये कहानियाँ और कविताएँ (Anamika 14)।

When women speak or demand something that has never been done before, this society tries to defame them in order to create discouragement in women. Women are claimed as characterless and rogue, and it is perceived they must be supported by some other men (in exchange, she must have slept with them). So, the poet criticizes a stereotypical society that never believed a woman could build her empire without their mercy and that a woman has the right and power to do the same as a man. A misconception is created that a woman has no existence once separated from her family or husband. They have no place that belongs to them; they must live under their father's rules before marriage, and after marriage, they owe everything to their husband. Unfortunately, these kinds of stereotypes have been taught in our schools, she writes:

याद था हमें एक-एक क्षण/आरंभिक पाठों का-/राम, पाठशाला जा !/राधा, खाना पका !/राम, आ बताशा खा !/राधा, झाड़ु लगा !/भैया अब सोएगा/जाकर बिस्तर बिछा !/अहा, नया घर है !/राम, देख यह तेरा कमरा है !/ और मेरा ? // ओ पगली./लड़कियाँ हवा, धूप, मिट्टी होती हैं/उनका कोई घर नहीं होता//जिनका कोई घर नहीं होता-/उनकी होती है भला कौन-सी जगह ?/कौन-सी जगह होती है ऐसी/जो छूट जाने पर औरत हो जाती है (Anamika 15)।

Discrimination between girls and boys has been taught to them since childhood.

Women/ girls are being compared to sunshine, wind, and sand, which have no definite place, so in the same way, we are taught that there is no specific place for girls. Before marriage, they are told, 'This is not your real house; your real home is your husband's house.' After marriage, this sentence turns into 'you are from another home'; hence, no specific home exists. The poet criticizes the education system which supports the inferiority of women and questions the existence of women without men: " अपनी जगह से गिर कर/कहीं के नहीं रहते केश, औरतें और नाखून " (Anamika 15)। Just like nails and the hair, are of no importance, once they are apart from their family or husbands, means women cannot survive or exist separately.

A woman suffers from loneliness because she is not considered a companion by her husband; she is more like a caretaker, so she is bound to bury all her feelings inside her. Because, as the poet mentioned throughout the whole work, nobody is concerned about her rights, feelings, or mental and emotional states. This position of the second sex is created by our social structure, which gave an inferior position to them. If society had given equality to both genders, society would have been different; she would not have endured many struggles and agonies. She is likelier to seek a husband as a companion rather than *pati parmesan*. Anamika portrays the agony of their being alone in the following lines:

मैं उनको रोज झाड़ती हूँ /पर वे ही हैं इस पूरे घर में/ जो मुझको कभी नहीं झाड़ते !/
रात को जब सब सो जाते हैं -/अपने इन बरफाते पाँवों पर आयोडिन मलती हुई सोचती
हूँ मैं -/किसी जनम में मेरे प्रेमी रहे होंगे फर्नीचर , /कठुआ गये होंगे किसी शाप से ये
!/
मैं झाड़ने के बहाने जो छूती हूँ इनको , आँसुओं से या पसीने से लतपथ/ इनकी गोदी
में छुपाती हूँ सर (Anamika 19)।

This woman has nobody with whom she can share her buried emotions, hence seeking companionship in a non-living thing. She assumes furniture might have been her companion in her last life because, unlike her husband, he neither scolded her nor made a fight, residing only in peace. Anamika presented a harsh reality of society, like how she feels disconnected from the outer world. Instead of hoping for love and care from her husband, she waits for furniture to be man and to love her. These lines demonstrate the solitude and bad mental state in a woman's life and her expectation of love, care, and a true friend.

ये किसकी चीख की तरह पसरे हैं जंगल ?/ एक चीख मेरे भी भीतर दबी है !/ उसका
बस चले अगर तो /मेरी पसलियाँ तोड़ती/ निकल आए बाहर ! /ये चीख मेरी /आदिवासी

रूपसी की तरह /अब तक किले के तहखाने में /टहल रही है बेबस (Anamika 43)।

The suppressed desires and feelings transformed into inner cries under the pressure of loneliness and frustration as they did not come outside. These unshared things, physical suffering, and different social barriers led her to depression.

A woman is supposed to be perfect in households, virtues and morally good. In her Poem "Pativarta", Anamika talks about rude and ignorant behavior of husbands. They treat them as their slave with whom the owner shares nothing and doesn't care about what's going inside her mind. The poet writes:

कायर ही करते हैं ,बार - बार मरने का कारबार । /जब तुमने ऐसी कुछ गलती नहीं की , फिर तुम यों मरी हुई बनकर क्यों लेटी ?' तबसे उन्हें आने लगी शरम - सी' रोज - रोज मरने में /... एक बार शरमातीं , लेकिन फिर कुछ सोचकर/ मर ही जातीं , /मरती हुई सोचती ' /चिड़िया ही होना था तो शुतुर्मुर्ग क्यों हुई मैं ,/ सूंघनी ही थी तो कोई लाड़ली नाक मुझे सूंघती/ यह क्या कि सूंघा तो साँप ।।' (Anamika 28)।

The pathetic situation of women has been depicted here, who have rude and careless husbands, and the poet also draws pictures of domestic violence through her words. These kinds of husbands treat their wives as enslaved people, beat them on little issues, scream at them, scold them, and abuse them whenever they want, and, in this way, they commit physical and mental violence against their wives. Still, instead of opposing them, these poor creatures tolerate them and hence encourage them to do more violence. If they raise a voice against them, they will be proved as an unfaithful, unvirtuous wife. Moreover, if they leave their husband's house, they do not have another house or any financial support. If a married woman lives at her father's house, this is not considered as less than a curse for parents.

The Narrator questions: : “जब तुमने ऐसी कुछ गलती नहीं की , फिर तुम यों मरी हुई बनकर क्यों लेटी ? ” (Anamika 28), she asks herself without committing any mistakes why she lays on his feet like she made an unforgettable mistake. She felt ashamed to be a suppressed one and went on a hunger strike to make her husband realize he did wrong. She seems inspired by Gandhi's strikes (Satyagraha, etc.), and in the same way, she tries to get her rights peacefully, but unfortunately, her strikes do not work. Who cares about her? Nobody! He did not even come to ask her what had happened? to convince her to have food and sort out the matter. These kinds of incidents symbolize the ignorant and careless behavior of patriarchy towards women. Eventually, the woman is the victim. Nobody cares about their issues; in the end, women are bound to accept all miseries and agonies as their fate. In the end, when the hunger is unbearable, after a few days, she takes food herself. Moreover, the kind of strike she did, of course, proved useless.

काम बहुत रहता है इनको ।\ठीक नहीं रहती तबीयत भी ।/अब छाती में इतना ज़ोर कहाँ/चिल्लाएँ, झिड़कें या पीटें ही बेचारे !/ धीरे-धीरे मैं भी हो ही गई पालतू ।/बीमार से रगड़ा क्या, झगड़ा क्या,/मैंने साध ली क्षमा (Anamika 29)।

However, regarding responsibilities, women have a maximum number of work to do. All the time they are busy. As a result, he suffers from fatigue, and the body becomes weak before time. Under the burden of duties and restrictions, she does

not have the physical strength to fight back. Eventually, she apologizes for the strike she did (considered a mistake on the woman's side) as they have no other options. They make themselves comfortable in every unpleasant situation created by their man. She writes-

मीठे लगते हैं खरटि भी इनके ।/ धीमे - धीमे ही कुछ गाते हैं/ अपने खरटों में ये ।/ कान लगाकर सुनती रहती हूँ/ शायद मुझे दी हो सपनों में आवाज ।/ कोई गुपचुप बात मेरे लिए दबा रखी हो (Anamika 28)!

She even finds her snoring husband pleasant. She listened to snoring carefully and hoped he may have given him a voice in his dreams, for which she had been searching for so long. This woman struggles for her husband's attention, love, and care. She wants her husband to understand her problems, wishes, and ambitions. She wants to feel desirable. This lady wants her ruling husband to be more like a friend and to listen to her rather than a torturer. When husband ignores her, she feels underappreciated and neglected. She craves for emotional intimacy.

Along with their suffering and struggle, the poet also emphasizes the contribution of women in making households happy and peaceful. These women ensure the stability and progress of everyone in their houses. Currently, they are not just contributing by doing household work but have also started supporting their family financially. Handling the whole house, including various responsibilities, keeps her busy all day; this is her mental and physical strength, making a woman the backbone of a family. In her poems, Anamika has also highlighted these aspects of Indian women:

मैंने तोड़ा खुद जैसे कि मजदूरनी /तोड़ती है पत्थर को कूट - कूटकर !/ धूल - धूल , कंकड़ी - कंकड़ी हुई ।/ उड़ी तो चुभी आँखों में किरकिरी - सी ,/ गिरी - धंसी तो थोड़ी नींव में पड़ी ,/ थोड़ी सड़कवाली गिट्टी में ,/ पुल के गारे में थोड़ी - सी/ थोड़ी - सी घर की दीवारों में (Anamika 28)!

The poet focuses on the contribution of women and their sacrifices for the family's welfare. A woman considered herself her man's comrade. She sacrifices her desires, pleasure, and dreams by killing them and sharing responsibilities with her husband; in this way, every woman tries to reduce the stress and strain of their men, hence maintaining peace and balance in the house. Now, her husband is accessible from every tension, and the only work associated with her man is economic upliftment, so she is an indirect inspiration and helper. A woman stands by her family in all ups and downs and shares her success and achievements. This is how a woman owes the entire house; a woman is the foundation of a house, and a home cannot exist without a foundation. The poet writes:

माँ ने मनुहार से सिखाया था ,/मैं ही नालायक थी - भूल गई !/ माँ का मन रहता था /सब - कुछ मैं सीख - साख/ हो जाऊँ पारंगत/ ताकि जिस घर जाऊँ ,/ सिर - माथे पर बिठाई जाऊँ/ प्यार करे दूल्हा ,/... कितना रखती है खयाल ,/कि बाँका होने नहीं देती बाल ,/ रखती है उनको सुरक्षित /अक्षरशः आरक्षित/ टोपी के घेरे में (Anamika 30-31)!

It emphasizes how girls are brought up in this way so that they can be

virtuous, perfect, and dutiful in every activity required in their daily routine. They are supposed to do every household cleanly and perfectly, whether cooking different dishes, sewing, knitting, cleaning, raising children, looking after older members, etc. If a woman is not good at doing these jobs, she is not considered a good wife and is being judged by everyone. How can she follow her passion if she is not given time? Indeed, she has to keep all her dreams and desires inside and have to live for the sake of others.

A woman has to suffer from these obstacles throughout her life whether it is childhood, youth or old ages. Poet describes womanhood in old age:

रहती हैं वृद्धाएँ, घर में रहती हैं/ लेकिन ऐसे जैसे अपने होने की खातिर हों क्षमाप्रार्थी
/-लोगों के आते ही बैठक से उठ जाती ./ छुप - छुपकर रहती हैं छाया - सी, माया -
सी !/ पति - पत्नी जब भी लड़ते हैं उनको लेकर/ कि तुम्हारी माँ ने दिया क्या ./ किया
क्या कुछ देर वे करती हैं अनसुना ./ कोशिश करती हैं कुछ पढ़ने की ./ बाद में टहलने
लगती हैं ./ और सोचती हैं बेचैनी से - ' गाँव गए बहुत दिन हुए (Anamika 49)।

When a woman enters in her last phase of life (old age), she tends to lose her importance. Adults consider them worthless human beings, the same sons who were brought up with love and care. Children of old persons assume him/her as useless. Old people are considered as burden and burden is meant to be released. The poet reveals the importance of old women. She says, when something is old and torn, their usefulness increases:

सजा-धजा रहता है घर का हर कमरा,/बच्चे ज़्यादा अच्छा पलते हैं,/उनकी नन्ही-मुन्नी
उल्टियाँ संभालती/ जगती हैं वे रात-भर,/उनके ही संग-साथ से भाषा में बच्चों की/ आ
जाती है एक अजब कौं /वृद्धाएँ धरती का नमक हैं,किसी ने कहा था!./ जो घर में हो
कोई वृद्धाखाना ज़्यादा अच्छा पकता है,/परदे-धमुहावरों, मिथकों,
लोकोक्तियों,लोकगीतों, /लोकगाथाओं और कथा-समयकों की (Anamika 48)।

Grandparents play an essential role in grandchildren's upbringing and taking care of them. Grandparents tell stories about religious topics, epics, folk songs, folk cultures, idioms, languages, etc., and share their childhood experiences. They also put moral values in them and convey different kinds of lessons. We get more care and affection when our grandparents are there. The poet resorts to the metaphor of 'Namak' (salt), which means someone essential for maintaining taste in every food. By passing stories from generation to generation related to religion and cult, they are certainly doing their duties by giving them moral values their duties. They keep our traditions and rituals alive and pass these on to the next generation.

Many women commit suicide when they become frustrated with domestic violence. They already have many responsibilities, plus they are bound to bear violence, too. In this challenging situation, she has to survive because society has made her dependent on others, so she has no shelter other than her husband after marriage. She has two choices: either tolerate an unhappy, boring life, stay with her husband, and accept it as fate (this is what she has been taught since childhood), or commit suicide. In her poems, Anamika points out:

साड़ी का फन्दा बनाकर लटक जाना पंखे से/ इतना आसान नहीं मरना भी ।/ पंखे पर

धूल जमी है जैसे सदियों की / फन्दा लगा लूँ कि पहले पोंछूँ मैं यह धूल पंखे की/
ऑचल से ?/ धूल - धूल , माटी - माटी होने के पहले /धूल - माटी पोंछ देने की चिन्ता/
एक भौंदा चुटकुला है (32-33)।

When life becomes intolerable, a person thinks of suicide. Further, Anamika says a woman is deeply immersed in her responsibility that even before committing suicide, she thinks of her household duties associated with her. The Narrator claims that hanging on a fan is not that easy. It symbolizes when she wishes to be free from all the problems and agonies by committing suicide; her responsibilities and duties keep her alive. She is worried about her children and who is going to look after her children after her death:

थककर सोए हैं दोनों बच्चे / सुबह - सुबह उठकर क्या चौकेंगे ? /छोटे को बाल तक
नहीं काढ़ना आता , /और बड़ा तो और है ! मोजे का उल्टा - सीधा भी नहीं जानता/
उठकर करेंगे उठाने की कोशिश ' /आज दिन चढ़े - तक सोयी कैसे अम्मा रही
(Anamika 33)?

These lines reveal her obligations as a mother. She is trying to decide whether she should live a disturbed life and take care of her darling children or leave this world for permanent peace and happiness. Her children are the only reason an unhappy woman remains alive. After being in a bad and miserable situation, she worries about her two little kids. These little kids will be surprised. Why has Amma not woken up the following day? Anamika resorts to metaphor: ‘ एक सिपाही मुझको बाँधे खड़ा है , एक कर रहा है तड़ीपार (34)!’ The first soldier stands for her responsibilities, especially towards her little kids, and the second stands for the chaos, misery, and struggle she is going through. These two soldiers are creating a dilemma for that unhappy lady.

Anamika has thoroughly debated the institution of husband in her poems. Instead of offering his romantic picture, the poet exposes the evil face of the husband: टूटी - बिखरी और पिटी हुई/ पीठ नीली ,/ चेहरा पीला , /लाल आँखें और/ जख्म हरे/
कुदरत के सब रंगों की बोतल/ उलट - पलट जाती है मुझ पर /उनके आते ही ! इसको
ही /कहते हैं क्या/ हींग लगे , न फिटकिरी /और रंग चोखा (Anamika 46)?

She suffers from severe physical injuries after her husband brutally beats her. Her back is blue because her husband has beaten her. Her eyes are red (she cries frequently), and her face is pale, which symbolizes her physical and emotional pain. The color of the scars is green (fresh, just got them), and these scars are always green, representing that he beats her frequently. These kinds of incidents break her down emotionally and physically. In this way, she experiences all kinds of colors in her life, which are not as enjoyable as Holi's; instead, they represent pathos, cruelty, and bad experiences. Patriarchy and social norms are the main reasons for these kinds of problems.

Women keep on suffering in the name of dignity of the family. Overall, this is a vicious circle to crush her desires, dreams, fundamental rights and feelings by making women live first under parents' rules then under husband's rules. She never had been queen of her own kingdom. She writes:

मेरी माँ/ अक्सर ही सोते में/ मुझको उड़ा देती है चादर !/ डर लगता है उसको मेरी /बेपर्दगी से ! /मुझे तो/ पता भी नहीं , /क्या मेरी नींद/ मुझे बेपर्द करती है ?/ बेपर्द करते हैं /मुझको मेरे ख्वाब ?..... गेहूँ के खेतों में जैसे बेमतलब/ रोज रात धुन्ध घनी/ चादर उड़ा जाती है/ भटकोइयों पर ! /क्या धुन्ध होती है/ भटकोइयों की माँ/ जो उनके ख्वाबों के/ बेपर्द होने से डरती है (Anamika 37-38)?

Her mother is afraid of showing her dreams in this patriarchal society. The same society never supported an ambitious girl, so she is bound to face disrespect and discouragement. The mother knows the consequences; hence, she covers herself with a blanket, symbolizing her fear of exposing her daughter's dreams. The Narrator compares the fear of her mother with fog. Poetry exposes society, which does not offer females enough freedom to express themselves. In an interview with Arundhati Subramaniam, Anamika shares the poetics of women's poetry: "Concealment or sublimation in women's writing is common – it is a defense mechanism, a form of censorship. It is oblique, so people can read it any way they like, and if they do not want to, they need not. Anyway, who takes women's writing seriously? Maybe, ultimately, one conceals things from oneself. It must be that."

The poet also talks about the problems of working women. They are not free from other responsibilities like a man who does jobs. When a man is responsible for supporting his family financially, he has no other responsibilities at home. However, when it comes to a lady, she has to pay for all her duties, from taking care of children to managing different kinds of home duties. Poet says.

फिर अपनी सब डॉलरें खर्च करके/ उसने किए तीन अलग - अलग कॉल !/ सबसे पहले अपने बच्चे से कहा /" हलो - हलो , बेटे/ पैकिंग के वक्त ... सूटकेस में ही तुम ऊँघ गए थे कैसे' ... सबसे ज्यादा याद आ रही है तुम्हारी/ तुम हो मेरे सबसे प्यारे (Anamika 26)!

This poem talks about the motherhood of a working lady. She never forgets her children and profoundly loves them wherever she is and whatever the situation is. This woman travels abroad, taking her obligation with her. First, she calls her three children individually and asks how they are all. Are they OK or not, etc? This scene depicts the duty and love of a lady as a mother. Even after being engaged in international affairs, the first thing that comes to her mind is her children. She represents softness, love, and care in motherhood.

Anamika raises earnest debates in contemporary Hindi poetic space. The personal and political tend to fuse in her poems. "Like any other kind of political poetry," she claims in one of her articles, "it [Contemporary women's poetry] prompts a deep questioning of identity and affiliation and goes out to affirm that the hand that rocks the cradle can also rock the system. Contemporary women's poetry at least negotiates and questions both meanings of this pun rather than choosing a single way of 'rocking' the world."

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