

## FEMINISM, FAMILY AND INTELLECTUALISM IN THE STORIES OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD

**Dr. Mekala Rajan**

Associate Professor,  
Department of English  
Madras Christian College,  
Chennai.

### Abstract

*The world today is fervently focused and fiercely oriented towards knowledge acquisition. This has also resulted in intellectualising relationships and transferring ideas based on individual assumptions. The power to think independently has strongly severed ones understanding of multiple perspectives that may provide a perfect understanding of life. Katherine Mansfield gently slices her way through the adult world that divides the mind of children by blocking their thought process with set patterns. Women in the stories are immature adults who depend on others for strength and acceptance. This dilemma that rests with cultured women is an issue to be resolved. Amidst cultural conveniences the women are seen as confused individuals. The caste, power, position, appearance and so on play a major role in society. One is attracted by these man made structures. Katherine Mansfield battles against these obstacles that block the freedom of peaceful existence. Therefore a new dimension to feminism that can offer the true knowledge beyond feminism and empowerment needs to be infused to augment the right approach to right living. Thus the stories of Katherine Mansfield force us to think of remaining inclusive, to love others selflessly, dissolve differences and promote peaceful and productive interactions within the family and society.*

**Key Words:** *Authentic Realism, Beyond Feminism, Cultural Conveniences, Humanistic Realism, Intellectualism.*

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- Dr. Mekala Rajan

**K**atherine Mansfield has culled out and infiltrated the insecurities of adults and has developed them into stories of cultural concerns. She has captured the cravings of the human mind and has charged them with surprising emotions. The thought process and the intricacies that complicate life are thoroughly tried and traced in a unique fashion through characters that remain confused. It is strange that the intellectuals and the affluent crumble and squirm under imaginary pressures. In the stories we find the educated, independent, empowered women to be the ones who are weak, indecisive, insecure and anxious. They lack inner strength. So the theory of feminism stands detached from life and praxis stays parted forever. It is only when the objectives of feminism are applied aptly to life that we can expect best results in society. 'Literature orders, interprets and articulates the relations between men and women, the puzzling manifestations of the human psyche, the effects of material conditions on human experience.' (Kenyon 8)

Katherine Mansfield has the power to transform very simple ideas into meaningful rich resources that could pulsate with life. Many, if not most, plots, and certainly those favored by the great nineteenth-century realists, turn on moments of revelation, recognition scenes, when the illusions nurtured by timidity, prejudice, or habit fall away, and a naked self confronts a naked world. These are the moments when identity is begun, renewed, or completed. (Levenson 93).

For example, her stories rested around gardens, insects, birds, children and so on. The stories radiated her feelings and fears that are anchored by autobiographical touches. 'KM, working flexibly within cultural and social restrictions and conventions, manages to a considerable extent to fit her own prescriptions and to be "defined and personal" in her criticism' (Hanson 8). They amplified her troubles and treasured her concerns.

The world had not been slow to retaliate against an innocence so rash. Unhappiness broke through in many guises: poverty, the war, separation and loneliness, desperate illness, deaths of those she loved, and the realization that her own death could not be far. Places once loved turned out hateful; friends proved bitter, indifferent, or cruel; hopes always lied." (Davin XV).

The stories project the various spaces of the human mind and the heart that most often fails to strike the right balance. The six stories chosen for discussion reveal the pain and pressure in coping with reality and the manner in which they echo the note of discord and uncertainty. Humanistic realism and authentic realism are tools employed to discover reality. The missing human touch has to be consciously activated in our day to day lives. Authentic realism needs to influence and balance the experimental novel. Nuances in technique can highlight innovation and newness but novels and stories should touch hearts in order to transform.

The novel is a language of the world; modern realism is webbed in with our dark, contemporary sense of broken connections between the individual and society, the conscious and the unconscious. The laws of realism are inherent in many texts that question them, while the 'imagination' has always been anxious about its link with the facts of the world (Kenyon 6).

The Dolls House perfectly presents social segregation as the Kelveys, Lil and Else are isolated and are viewed with contempt as they are children of the lower class. But Kezia one of the Burnell children 'invites them into the backyard to see the house disregarding the strict order of her mother not to associate with them."Like two little stray cats" they follow her across the courtyard where the doll's house stands' (Chatterjee 312). Social barriers and the constrictions imposed by adults curb the freedom of children to think and act on their own.

*Sun and Moon* is a story that celebrates life and describes the family gathering. The excitement and elaborate arrangements that arrest one's attention is picturized. The decorations, the cake, ice cream and so on, tempt the friends and the relatives to involve wholeheartedly in socializing. While the adults are concerned about their attire and appearance the two children Sun and Moon are ignored. There was nobody to look after Sun and Moon. Nurse was helping Annie alter Mother's dress which was much-too-long-and-tight-under-the-arms and Mother was running all over the house and telephoning Father to be sure not to forget things. She only had time to say: "Out of my way, children!"(Davin 164).

They are dismissed to the nursery and are kept out of the party. As Moon insists that her father should carry her, she becomes part of the entertainment. Mechanically she is lifted and then sent away to the room upstairs. They view the beautiful sight from above. Later, after dinner, as the guests leave, the children come down. They are upset and disappointed to find the delicious things they had seen on the table all strewn around. Sun is visibly hurt and voices his unhappiness.

‘Sun did not move from the door. Suddenly he put up his head and gave a loud wail.

“I think it's horrid – horrid” he sobbed.

“There you see !” said Mother. “You see.!”

“Off with you”, said Father, no longer jolly. “This moment. Off you go!”

And wailing loudly, Sun stumped off to the nursery." (Davin 170).

This resentment and frustration experienced by the children at a very young age go unnoticed by the adults. They are not conscious of the pain experienced by the children. The indifference of the adults who are preoccupied with their interests and their insensitive attitude calls for attention and change.

A *Cup of Tea* brings out Rosemary's approach to Ms Smith, a young girl who was in a shop on a rainy day hoping to buy a cup of Tea. Rosemary offered to get her a cup of tea and bring her home and make her comfortable in their house while her husband was a little worried about her impulsive decision. Later as the husband comments that Ms Smith was pretty the wife turns insecure and packs the girl off and turns to the husband to ask him if he found her pretty. These insecurities can be destructive.

Rosemary's agitation is seen as she voices her resentment all of a sudden, "You absurd creature" said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing - room and sat down at her desk . Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty ! Lovely! ( Davin 352). The relationship is therefore not strong enough and not built on factors beyond the superficial. ‘All refuse to see the other person's

point of view; all are insensitive, truculent, and apt to stand on their rights. And the results are mutinies, strikes, and near riots which threaten the social fabric, break up families, and kill people- (Newton164).

*The Fly* is another puzzling unexpected approach of Mr Woodifield to a fly that falls into the ink bottle. Reminded of his only son's death and grave and the way he built his business for his son hoping he would turn prosperous, he experiences excruciating pain but finds no tears to support his agony. He pushed the fly that he helped to get out of the ink bottle repeatedly that the fly finally dies. At that moment the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into his broad inkpot, and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again.....But just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting - paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great heavy blot. ( Davin 357). He tried conquering death and pain in his own fashion. Mr Woodifield forgets his sorrow and feels wretched and frightened unable to re- experience his memories and emotions . The social drama that masks reality is seen. The struggle is displayed through the fly.

*Mr and Mrs Dove* highlights the power of thought that Anne possessed. Her intellectual exercises and analysis about her future, her assessment and her arguments about life present her as an empowered individual. Her best fiction radically questions the form and ideas that bind women and men as well, into inauthentic lives. It is not of its hallmarks. While the surfaces of her art is one of its hallmarks. While the surfaces of her stories often flash with sparkling detail, the underlying tones are sombre, threatening, and register the danger present in the most innocent seeming aspects of life. (Fullbrook 8).

The concept of love is shared, expressed, understood and explained with intensity. Yet Anne Proctor is not willing to accept Reginald wholeheartedly to be her life partner. Materialistic possessions, physical appearances, and other external factors are considered and Anne politely tells Reginald that she cannot accept him. Yet, she knows Reginald's intensity of love and his longing to possess her while she describes the movements of the doves in her house. She explains how Mr. Dove walks behind Mrs Dove endlessly for her consent. She compares Reginald to Mr. Dove and hopes for his happiness and refuses to let him go with a sad state of mind. Finally, as he leaves she calls him, addressing him as "Mr. Dove" and asked him to get back to her. This concludes on a note of expectation and ambiguity.

“How can you talk of cutting off now?” said Anne scornfully. She stamped her foot at Reggie; she was crimson. How can you be so cruel? I can't let you go until I know for certain that you are just as happy as you were before you asked me to marry you. Surely you must see that, it's so simple ( Davin 281).

The love Reginald expresses for Anne is pure, true and sincere. Yet the societal norms and expectations tempt the individuals towards superficiality that destroy lives. *The Canary* talks about the confidence one can derive from birds and not human beings. An old woman who has four lodgers knows that they tease her and make fun of her. ‘In fact, I overheard them one evening talking about me on the stairs as “The Scarecrow”’. No matter. It doesn't matter. Not in the least. I quiet understand. They are young. Why should I mind?’ (Davin 361). Her only comfort was the canary but now she lives in her thoughts and finds her strength in her memories.

...All the same , without being morbid, and giving way to - memories and so on, I must confess that there does seem to me something sad in life. It is hard to say what it is. I don't mean the sorrow that we all know, like illness and poverty and death. No, it is something different. It is there, deep down, deep down, part of one, like one's breathing. (Davin 362).

Loneliness and a sense of emptiness govern her life. ‘Her usual method is to show the ' loneliness' , or horror, gradually breaking into the awareness of a central character, who is usually a woman from a background like her own or a very young child’ (Williams 65).The crux of the stories reveal the fact that parents need to be more sensitive to the needs of the growing children and should give them the needful support and love. Adults should not construct psychological barriers within the minds of children and force them to see life the way they want them to see. This leads to arresting the child's vision and blocking their vision. Love in the story *Mr and Mrs Dove* is the greatest feeling of all and without love other things can become meaningless; ‘Rather gender roles were constructed, modified and reinforced - and sometimes challenged - in religious, scientific, medical, political, legal and literary discourses and practices : including the writings of early modern women’ (Knoppers 9). Life and death can offer a complex idea of life. Difficulties and disappointments at an early age can affect and scorch the mind and future of individuals but trying to focus on the positive side can be helpful for a pleasant life. *The Canary* throws light on the need to appreciate and support people irrespective of the age and class. Loneliness must be erased by the concern and help extended by the society.

Humanitarian spirit should be activated and care should be given to our fellow human beings. The culture therefore should cater to the security it offers to individuals and feminism should furnish fruitful future by focusing on happiness that can energize and inject freshness wherever feminists are involved.

No one should be surprised by distortions or simplifications. Nor should anyone waste tears of sympathy on figures who were more than willing to cut the shape of the past to fit present polemical purposes. And yet the task of rendering a fuller account is justified not only by the desire to provide richer, thicker narratives but also by a pressing need to clarify our own position. A coarsely understood Modernism is both a historical blight and a contemporary disability (Levenson 1).

Ambiguities in the stories present life in a state of perplexity. What Katherine Mansfield claims for the artist, whether male or female, is the possibility of the conscious application of intention to shape and change the contents of consciousness. And the way out of self, for Katherine Mansfield, was specifically technique, that is, the invention of a new way of speaking, a new way of ordering the reportage of perception that encoded a change in the nature of perception itself by enunciating a change in what could be perceived. The artist, by so working, demonstrates and enacts the power of consciousness to change history (Fullbroke 26).

This frustrates and dampens life. Gloom is glorified in ways that make one uncomfortable. Unexpressed emotions and fears find a death like life. The anticipation for betterment and change is continual but the dualities of life and death as experienced by the writer expresses the paradox of pain and pleasure. This replicates rapidly. The reality is burdensome and self-assertion is uncertain. Fantasies are claimed to regulate dreams and reformulate patterns in life. In Sun and Moon anticipation turns out to be a delusion. The reasoning is limited and is also superficial.

Boggs feels that if we need to construct and establish a really new social order then we certainly has to become more human. It is this humanness that can change the existing reality that is so unreal. Joy Kogawa a social activist who has detected that " suffering is the common denominator of what it means to be human and that which enables the recognition of our universally shared condition as vulnerable creatures ....to vividly picture ourselves in another

person's place, that we can expand our moral imagination , making ourselves more likely to respond with the morally illuminating and therefore just sort of response." (Moya 199) The transformative power according to her are the" power of trust and love" (201) "The emotions of trust and love and the values of mutuality and solidarity thus function as evaluative concepts that we can use to gauge a society's moral health and political development" (201).

For the world to entertain peace, the families should enjoy love and peace. ‘Art is not an attempt of the artist to reconcile existence with his vision ; it is an attempt to create his own world *in this world*’( Hanson11). Only when peace is experienced will they know the value and importance of peace. The power of peace must speak for itself. It has to be displayed through actions. A graceful heart and soul can work wonders in the society. Global problems must be nullified by the insight one possesses on account of experiential learning. All the stories present strange situations that are devoid of peace. Therefore literary works can provide as catalysts to bring the family, society, nation and the world together in blissful harmony. Katherine Mansfield’s stories are ‘transcriptions of man's inner life’ (Chatterjee 13). Therefore literature touches lives and transforms the society towards holistic and peaceful development.

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