

Kamla Bhasin

24-4-1946 to 25-9-2021

Vibhuti Patel pays a heart-warming tribute to a fellow feminist.



Kamala Bhasin has left us. Her passing has caused an irreparable loss to the feminist movement and One Billion Rising Movement in Asia. Kamaladi, as she was popularly known, lives in her songs, verses, stories, speeches, publications in multiple languages and the most importantly in our hearts and minds. Thousands of scholars, activists, young adults with non-English background (ridiculed by their elite peers as VERNACs) got their understanding of feminism by studying Kamala Bhasin's booklets of feminism, patriarchy, gender-based violence so on and so forth. Kamala made discourses on women's rights accessible to first generation learners. She became their pathway to the feminist worldview.

Kamla beautifully played with words, 'Email' was coined as 'SHE MAIL' and 'HERO' became 'SHERO'. Kamla replaced 'Halla Bol' in feminist sloganeering with the word 'Azadi'. She hugged everyone and lived the feminist slogan, 'Personal is Political and Political is Personal'. Kamla was a multifaceted persona- writer, lyricist, singer, mentor, facilitator, sloganeer, communicator. Her mischievous humour, her vitality, her enthusiasm were unique. At the International Meet on Women and Health in 2005, Kamla started her plenary lecture with a statement, of course, with twinkle in her eyes and mischievous smile, "I do not use power-point, I am a power-point". The participants more than 65 countries were in splits. Kamla mesmerised her audience with her witty jokes. One of her most popular quotable quotes against copyright was, "NO COPYRIGHT, but Right to Copy". Kamla derivatised her intellectual and creative resources to build the women's movement in Asia.

Kamla Bhasin was a founder member of Jagori , Pacific and Asia Forum (1985-1995), South Asia Women Network, Aurat Foundation and played a pivotal role in forging solidarity among the feminist movements across South Asian countries. She actively supported the Indian Association for Women's Studies right from its inception, was also the General Secretary of

IAWS for Jaipur Conference and attended all IAWS National Conferences. In the last Conference at the National Law University, Delhi, Kamala's speech brought to the fore heroism of the women's rights movement and raised slogans for protecting the Constitution of India and of course, her most popular slogan of AZADI raised in her spirited style echoed in the conference hall and lifted everybody's spirit. In May 2021, we had invited her as a chief Guest to address the International Conference but due to her ongoing medical investigation she could not join us, but held a long conversation on the telephone.

Kamla was a phenomenon who enabled 1000 flowers to bloom. She was completely focussed on strengthening transnational feminist solidarity. Her disciplined way of functioning resulted into ideas germinating to action promptly. For the younger generation of women and men, Kamla was a pied piper. Her boundless energy in the midst of multifaceted challenges in her personal life, gave hope to hundreds of single women facing patriarchal onslaught of violence and discrimination. Her slogan created in the 1982 at the 10-day Kriti- For Creative Expression workshop organised by Saheli, Delhi and Women's Centre, Mumbai, 1+1=11 became a guru-mantra for the women's rights organisations.

On a personal note: My mother was a great fan of Kamla. She was so enchanted by Kamla's deconstruction of the concept of patriarchy in a palatable manner in the TV series '*Satyamev Jayate*' that she discussed it with all her peers endlessly!

Her *satrangi* sensitivity lifted the spirits of everyone who came in touch with her. Kamla was an altruist to the core. She contained her sorrow in her life and alleviated pain of people around her till her last breath. On October 3, JAGORI organised a beautiful online meeting to celebrate Kamla's life. It was an affirmative occasion in which close friends and co-travellers in her life journey shared their fascinating personal vignettes. Her feminist friends from Nepal, Pakistan, Germany, Turkey, and the US found Kamla a powerhouse of universal love averred, "Kamla, we miss you, but we won't let you die."

Person like me was not a part of Kamla's inner/intimate circle, but I always felt an affinity with her. Kamla has left a long-lasting legacy of self discipline, power of love, value of nurturing relationship. Kamla lives with us through her verses and slogans, songs and stories, publications and videos boosting our morale to strive for social transformation for gender equity, equality and human rights of all genders.

Women's movement in India has lost three veteran and visionary feminists within one month, Gail Omvedt on 25-8-2021, Sonal Shukla on 9-9-2021 and Kamala Bhasin on 25-9-2021.

Dear Kamla, the women's movement in India will miss your live performances, electrifying singing, energetic dancing and forceful speeches for assertion of women's rights and secular humanism. In sisterhood and solidarity with all fellow feminists of Jagori- SANGAT- Equity Foundation and many more, friends and family members of Kamla Bhasin.

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