

Gender and Sexuality in the Selected Poems of Kishwar Naheed

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Abstract: The paper aims at analysing Kishwar Naheed's selected poems from feminist point of view. This paper shows the way Gender and Sexuality intertwined in the poems of Kishwar Naheed. Kishwar Naheed writes about women condition, social status and identity of women in Pakistan particularly and sub continental women in general. Sex is biological difference of male and female whereas Gender is socially constructed roles for male and female. This socially constructed Gender roles oppress women in the name of culture, tradition and religion. The paper is trying to bring out the ways Kishwar Naheed raising a voice against gendered Society.

Keywords: Gender and Sexuality, Kishwar Naheed, gendered Society, raising a voice

1. Introduction

Kishwar Naheed is one of the best-known feminist poets of Pakistan. Born in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh, India in 1940, her family moved to Lahore in Pakistan during the 1947 Partition of the sub-continent. Kishwar had to fight to receive an education at a time when women did not go to school; she studied at home and obtained a high school diploma through correspondence courses, but went on to receive a master's degree in Economics from Punjab University.

Kishwar Naheed is one among the many Urdu women writers like Ismat Chughtai, Ada Jafri, Fahmida Riaz who brought feminist ideologies into Urdu literature. The dominant thought that exists in Kishwar Naheed's poetry is a strong desire to break away from the social construct which she was brought up with to challenge the authoritarian attitude of state and society to control a woman's body and sexuality. She used poetry at critical historical moments to discuss intimate issues of self, emotions, and sexuality that could not, in their socio-historical contexts, be otherwise expressed (Ananatham 209)

Her poetry shows resistance against outpourings of sexist notion of a submissive, naïve, docile and obedient woman. Her poems show resistance to phallogocentric ideals, patriarchal notions of making women a cultural ambassador, male dominated ideologies and the societal attempts to outline rebellious feminine identity. Naheed's poems challenge male models of ghazal and lyrical nazm and she explores new genres of literature to express her experiences. She writes down her unique experiences using new genres like azaad nazm or prose

poems, blank and free verse. The paper discusses poems like: A Palace of Wax, We Sinful Women, I am not that woman and The Rain within Myself.

2. Gender and Sexuality

Many of the feminist women poets show concern for women identity. The feminists have been telling that Gender is socially and economically constructed. Kate Millet in her famous book Sexual Politics explains that even sexuality plays with power. Gender is not about biological difference but it is a socially constructed word; as Simone de Beauvoir said in her *The Second Sex* "One is not born but becomes a woman". The poems of Kishwar Naheed, Urdu poet unravel women issues, challenges and concerns specifically of Pakistan and broadly of the subcontinent women.

The poem 'A Palace of Wax' can be read as a narrative of trauma of partition of Subcontinent. The poem is a powerful expression of women becoming the victim male anger. Huzaifa Pandit in her essay 'a feminist reading of selected poems of Kishwar Naheed' writes "the violent partition of the sub-continent serves as the background for examining the feminine vulnerability" (4). The poem explicitly shows the victimization of women in "anxiety of religious identification which was marked male on account of the public scrutiny of the penis" (Huzaifa 4). The mother in the poem used to get up at nights because of night mares. Her screaming at night and her gestures make us to think that she might be the victim of partition. So, the trauma of the partition pushing her towards the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The mother of the speaker is unable to forget that dreadful incident took place in her past. But one night she did not scream but woke up and "She held me tight in silent fear" (A Palace of Wax 12). The mother in her dream saw that her daughter was drowning and she jumped into the water to save her. But, on that night the lightning kills a buffalo and her fiancé. It is very interesting to attribute gender to lightning. That night she lightning killed our buffalo and my fiancé. (A Palace of Wax 19-20) Even lightning a bad thing befall on them is feminine. She shows the myth that is always a woman's fault (Huzaifa 5). The poem can be read as silencing women in male dominated societies. In this poem the mother never articulates her dreams but suffers silently. On the other

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hand, the daughter starts experiencing night mares but even she does not articulate her dreams. And if someone asks us, we just tell them, we can't remember our dreams (A Palace of Wax 33-35).

Both poems "We Sinful Women" and "I am not that woman" explores the ways women have been labelled. The speakers in these two poems differentiating themselves from other group of women. The speakers not saying who they are but they are telling that who they are not. The speakers in the poems want to draw a line between false liberty and identity. In the poem "We Sinful Women" the collective voice of a group speaks out their rage. The poem shows that the harvest of women's hardship and sacrifices have been taken by men. The women in the poem says that they have been used by the male dominated society. Half of the human population enjoying on the struggles of another half of the population. The women ask for justice and they show their resentment against false notion of looking women as second-rate citizens.

"It is we, sinful women

who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns
who don't sell our lives
who don't bow our heads
who don't fold our hands together"

The poem shows that women have been dominated, ruled and oppressed by patriarchy. The women in the poem forced to be submissive. But their counterparts are enjoying freely their liberty.

The poem 'I am not that woman' shows the difference between eastern women and western women. The speaker in the poem gives a warning call to those who believe that western women have got liberty. But, in true terms they failed to get it. The poem opens by saying that the speaker in the poem compares herself with the women who sells socks and shoes. The speaker in the poem describes herself by contrasting the identity of the women in the poster. She tells that she is unlike the women because she is the one who is being locked in the four walls of house, she has been kept imprisoned but her voice cannot be smothered by walls of stones. She has been crushed by customs and traditions. She says that her will power is like light which cannot be hidden in the darkness. The woman in the poem tells that she has been cheated and deserted. The men folk have taken pleasure and love from her but she has been given pain and humiliation. Nevertheless, she has been chained but her fragrance her courage cannot be chained. She says that she can walk on water when she is drowning; it means she can face any difficulty or challenge in the life. She tells that she has been sold and bought in the name chastity. She has been married off to get rid of the burden. She has been traded as commodity for her chastity, motherhood and loyalty.

"I am the commodity you traded in,

My chastity, my motherhood, my loyalty.
Now it is time for me to flower free.

The woman on that poster, half-naked, selling socks and shoes-

No, no, I am not that woman!"

She says that the mind of the society is enslaved to age old ideas of imprisoning women in the houses. These societies

cannot be freed. Even though she has been suppressed, the speaker in the poem is self-confident and courageous to think positively. Every stanza in the poem ends with an optimistic note. The woman in the poem tells that this is the time for her to flower free. She believes that her status will soon change. The narrator of the poem tell that eastern women have been struggling under patriarchal notions and male dominated ways. On the other hand, wester women have been remained just as a body. The narrator of the poem urges for an identity and status beyond women body. The narrator puts objection about objectifying women body. The speaker in the poem says that she is not the woman who has been confined to her body. In the western countries' women have been given freedom but her value is attached to her body. According to the tone of the poem this is another kind of oppression is being done against women in the western countries.

The poem 'The Rain within Myself' deals with sexual violence on women with in the bond of marriage. In our society the institution of marriage has been given prominence place. But male dominated society uses this institution to suppress women. The poem very powerfully brings out the suffering of women with in marriage institution. The female in the poem fails to overcome her struggles. The poem shows the sexual violence made by men on women.

"To you, I was a window.

You opened me

And enjoyed the scene as you pleased,

And inhaled the breeze and colors."

Objectification is one of the central concepts in feminist theory. Kishwar Naheed in her poetry again and again resists this sexual objectification of women in the society by the patriarchy. The poem opens with stating her husband's act of getting pleasure from her but least bothered about her emotions. The words used in the poem show that he never treated her as human being. He just used her body just like an in animate things. The speaker of the poem failed to enjoy a bond or a relationship with her husband. The husband in the poem used her as a window to enjoy the cool breeze. Even he used her as a warm robe to protect himself from storm. The husband in the poem is very dominative that he never thinks of his wife. He does not treat her properly.

"To you, I was a tunnel,

Where you could shelter when you wished

And could conceal me too.

To keep your footprints from sight

You walked in me for life"

The above stanza of the poem powerfully explains rape of wives in the hands of husbands. The sexual violence and assault can be witnessed with in the marital bond. The speaker in the poem tells not just her condition but also many women who have been witnessing sexual violence in marriage and suffering sexual assault every time silently. The speaker tells that she has been serving her husband without uttering a word against him. Afsara Raheen in her article titled 'Carnal Fierceness' in Kishwar Naheed's Poems the Rain within Myself and A Story' tells that the women in the poem is treated as a passage to protect himself from storm. The husband in the poem not just

takes protection from her but also hides her capability of protecting from world. The husband in the poem never articulates her qualities to the world. The speaker tells that the husband in the poem always takes shelter in her to hide his faults from the world. The husband in the poem is very harsh and never bothered with her emotions (1218).

Throughout the poem the speaker goes on speaking about her condition and her status as an object to be used by her husband. The poem powerfully articulates many married women conditions. The husband in the poem least bothered with his wife's emotions and he never treat or looked at her as a living entity. He just made use of her. He has the skill to modify her as he wanted her to be used. The husband in the poem treated her as 'dream', 'sand' and 'water'. It is very much obvious that all these objects can easily change their shape or they are shapeless. These objects can fit into any form of vessel they are put into. Similarly, the patriarchal society expects women to be formless and shapeless. They have to fit into the roles assigned to them by the male dominated society.

“When you talk in your dreams,
I have to listen, lying awake.
But no dreams listens
To my wakeful words”

The last stanza of the poem explicitly shows subordinate position of women not just in marital bond but also in the male dominated society. A woman is expected to be very obedient and submissive. The society never allows her to speak. A dutiful wife should stay awake and listen to her husband's talking even in dreams. But her voice is never heard. The speaker regrets that her voice is unheard. Her 'wakeful words' are not heard by others. The patriarchal society is always living in a fear of women's voice. That's why women have been kept under silence. The last stanza shows the obedience is shown by a woman towards her counterpart but in return she receives his carelessness and negligence. It is very much obvious from the poem that women have been treated as objects of pleasure in

the patriarchal society.

3. Conclusion

Kishwar Naheed very strongly foregrounds women objectification, gendered society and women sexuality in her poems. From the above discussion of four poems of Naheed it obvious that women representatives in all these poems are from gendered society. A society that believes women are inferior to men, women need not to have their own identity or that society believes women do not an identity at all. Women in all these poems are victims of patriarchal society. They have witnessed the sufferings of women in a gendered society. The society looks at them as objects those come in hand for men's assistance. Women in such a society do not have their own space. They fail to express their sexuality. They have been oppressed in the name of culture, religion and chastity. They have been treated as in human objects.

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