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HOME

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"I AM NOT THAT WOMAN" - POEM ANALYSIS

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Introduction:

"I am not that woman" is a feminist poem, written by Kishwar Naheed. As a Indo - Pakistani woman , she has described the plight of women in third world countries in a poignant way. But the poem is not just idle brooding over the fate of women; it is a strong declaration by a woman who has had enough and is now prepared to stand and break free of everything that shackles her. The poem is a ray of hope and confidence to women, with an empowering undertone that women are capable of rising above all the shackles, if they have the willpower; while mockingly pointing fingers at the duplicity and double dealings of a misogynistic society.

Poet:

Kishwar Naheed is a Urdu feminist poet. She was born and brought up in India and moved to Pakistan during the Partition. She saw the sufferings of women during the Partition with her own eyes, which left a deep impression on her and inspired her to become a feminist. She has won several awards for her poems.

Background:

The poem is based upon the deep rooted stereotypes and prejudices against women in the Eastern culture. The various customs and traditions in the Eastern culture are always biased towards women. They are all invisible shackles created to control women and always keep them under the male dominance, all done in the name of "protecting women". These stereotypes and customs are picked up and mocked upon by the poet in this poem.

Theme:

The theme of the poem is women emancipation and empowerment. The poet picks upon the prevailing regressive notions about women, mocks them and bravely declares that such backward notions can no longer be used to shackle women. She also takes a dig at the hypocrisy and double standards of men, who treat women differently according to their own preferences. Women, with their confidence and willpower, can rise above any such cultural restrictions and unfair standards. The poem proclaims that women have enough strength to rise and live their lives on their own conditions, without the need to conform to any outdated norms.

Speaker:

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from first hand experience and generalises it to all the women around her. She speaks about herself, but she speaks for all her women counterparts. She seems to be addressing or rather "reminding" the men who made her life miserable; or it can be thought that she is addressing the patriarchal nature of society itself instead of men.

Tone:

The tone of the poem is quite brave and even mocking in nature. The poet uses a mocking tone as she picks up and mockingly reminds men about their archaic views about women, which is common in the society. She sounds very bold and courageous as she proudly declares that men had no idea of her strength, as she has risen above all that nonsense and is now a proud independent woman. So, the tone of the poet is a mixture of mockery, satire, bravery and courage.

Mood:

The mood of the poem is that of aplomb and determination. Though the poem has a tinge of melancholy, when the plight of women is described; the predominant mood of the poem is boldness and resolution, when the poet says that she (a woman) can advance and rise above all.

Language:

The language of the poem is extremely simple. All the words used are words of daily usage. No complicated words or phrases are used. The simplicity of the language makes the poem more realistic and relatable.

Characters:

Since the poem is in first person, the central character of the poem is the poet herself. But since the poem speaks about all women, the central character can be said to be any woman, who has suffered atrocities at the hands of patriarchy. The poet is directly addressing the men (or rather the patriarchal society) in the poem. So, the characters in the poem can be thought of as the poet and the men in her life. Or it can be generalised as women addressing the patriarchal nature of society.

Structure:

The poem lacks a uniform structure. The stanzas are unevenly divided. There are five stanzas in the poem. They are of varying length, with 5, 6 or 10 lines in them. There is no specific metre or rhyme scheme also. But, these oddities are no obstacle in understanding or enjoying the poem. The poem follows a unique pattern, wherein the poet first speaks about a constraint and then speaks about how it didn't bind her.

Imagery:

The poet uses a few but powerful allegories to put her point across. The allegories used in the poem are all real and grounded. They stimulate the reader and give a clear "vision" of what the poet wants to say, without exaggeration.

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standards with which they treat women.

2. The restrictions put upon women are compared to stone walls, heavy weights and chains.
3. The sufferings which women are subjected to are compared to darkness, thorns and fire embers.
4. Words like free breeze, light, flowers and walking on water are used to convey freedom and liberty.

Summary:

The poem is all about the age-old constraints imposed on women, supported by big empty talks of culture and traditions. The poet proceeds in a smooth and gradual manner as she picks up and mocks all the tribulations she had to undergo, while also proudly asserting that those things have not curbed her fierce spirit. The poet picks upon the double crossing of men, who enjoy the sight of beautiful actresses and call them cheap, while the women who suffer under their dominance are called "good and cultured". The poet speaks of the ill treatment she had to go through to be a "good and cultured" woman in the eyes of men and the society.

1. The poem opens with the poet saying that she is not that woman on the advertisement posted, who sells socks and shoes. She reminds the men that she is the woman whom men hid in stone walls, while they roamed free like the breeze. But, the poet says that the men did not know that her voice couldn't be stopped by the stone.

This stanza points to the hypocrisy of men. They enjoy the sight of beautiful women on the advertisement posted, but keep women of their family confined in the house. They treat actresses as cheap women and the women of their family as "good, cultured" women. This shows their double standards. Also, they themselves roam freely without any restrictions, while they restrict women to the house, all in the name of protecting them. The poet picks this hypocrisy of men and boldly declares that the men did not know that her voice could not be stopped by stone, meaning that the restrictions did not stop her from rising questions and demanding her freedom.

2. Next, the poet says that she is the woman who the men crushed under the weight of customs and traditions, meaning that the men used customs and traditions to make women suffer. But, the men did not know that light cannot be hidden in darkness, meaning that her knowledge, skills and confidence could not be kept hidden by tradition, just because she was a woman. She reminds men that they had picked flowers from her lap and planted thorns and embers, meaning the men extracted all good and positive things from her, while giving her only bad and negative things in return. The poet says that the men did not know that her fragrance could not be smothered by chains, meaning that just as fragrance from a flower can't be tied by chains, similarly she also cannot be tied down by customs.

3. The poet next says that she is the woman who was traded as an object in i.e., bought and sold. This atrocity was done in the name of her own chastity. Here the poet is speaking about the custom of arranged marriage and dowry, where daughters are sold to the richest and most prestigious families along with a huge sum of dowry. This tradition is defended saying that it is done to protect the chastity of women and keep them pure. The

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that the her ability to continue progressing in her life despite several restrictions will appear like a miracle to men.

4. In the penultimate stanza, the poet says that she is the woman who was married off in a hurry, to get rid of a burden. She is again referring to the custom of arranged marriage, wherein parents treat their own daughter as a burden which should be gotten rid of. They marry off their daughter in a hurry and feel that they have completed their responsibility and got rid of a burden. The parents do not take their daughter's opinion in that matter. The daughter is an liability for her parents, not a loveable child. The poet says that the parents who do this must know that a nation of captive minds can never be free. It implies that a nation which is full of narrow minded and backward people can never be truly free or independent. The parents may think that they are free once they have married off their daughter, but in reality they are the prisoners of their own small minds and narrow thinking. Also, a nation filled with such people can never be independent and prosperous, even though it may be free from foreign rule. Here, the poet seems to be taking a dig at the apparent freedom of the subcontinent from British rule.

5. Lastly, the poet says that she is the commodity who was traded in her chastity, motherhood and loyalty. She means that all these ideals were forced upon her by the patriarchal society. She was just a commodity to be traded between two families. Chastity was expected of her, motherhood was forced upon her and loyalty was imposed on her. Her own desires were never taken into account. And all this was done to make her a good and cultured woman in front of the society. A woman is expected to be loyal to her husband throughout her life and is often forced to become a mother at a young age, even when she doesn't wish to. The only respectable status conferred upon women in a patriarchal society is that of a loyal and chaste wife and a mother. The individuality of women is suppressed and they are treated as commodities with certain specifications. The poet says that she has enough of it now and now, it is her time to flower free. She means that she will now spring forward with confidence and will blossom freely in life like a flower, without caring about any custom or tradition. The last line of the poem is again a satirical dig at the false virtuous nature of men, as the poet says that she is not the half naked woman on the poster, selling socks and shoes.

Analysis:

The poem is sure to pull at the heartstrings of its readers and make them sympathize with the women who live such a restricted life, while applauding the courage of the poet. It will leave a special profound impact on women readers from the Eastern countries. The relatability of the poem, along with the daring words of the poet is sure to give a push to the confidence of women and give them hope in life.

Conclusion:

Thus, it can be concluded that the poem "I am not that woman" is an apt description of the sad state of women in the Eastern countries, which also points out the deceptiveness of the patriarchal society, besides asserting that women can be free of this bunkum if they have confidence in themselves. The poem is realistic and relateable in its pinpointing of the various suffocating rules of the patriarchal society, while also giving women a hope of a

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