

## **Gender Inequality in Kishwar Naheed's "I am not That Woman"**

**V. Nandhini**

**Ph.D. Scholar**

**L.R.G. Govt. Arts College for women**

**Tiruppur**

**India**

Our country has not been successful in eliminating social inequality and discrimination on the basis of gender. Like race and ethnicity, gender is a social construct. Gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same status. Because of the current situation of inequality, it cannot be achieved without the empowerment of women. Both equality and empowerment are necessary to achieve political, social, economic, cultural and environment security.

Kishwar Naheed is a woman writer of Indo-Pakistan. Her poem, "I am not That Woman" is a beautiful poem which is written in the first person's narration. She expresses the cruelties done upon her by her family and society. Though she describes her own problem, the poem stands for a symbol of all the torture upon women. She also depicts her passion, dream, desire and wants of equal status and rights.

In the poem, "I am not That Woman", the poet, Kishwar Naheed wants to convey that a woman can become a powerful woman if she does not have the bonds of marriage, motherhood, and maintainer of tradition. As she is restricted by men, she has to do what people expect her. She is unable to do freely as she wants and so she becomes frustrated and weak. Hence, the poet asks for self-freedom from the society and proclaims that the natural talent of women cannot be forbidden by any force.

In the beginning of the poem, the poet says that she does not belong to that kind of ordinary woman who sells socks and shoes for men. Only men give such lower work to women because they want to lower women's status. Men feel superior and so they hide and lock the women in the walls of houses by telling that it their tradition and custom. As women are kept within the walls of stones, the poet feels that she is surrounded by stones and not by love and care from her family. Here, the poet implies that her family members do not show love to her. All behave like stones to her without having love or care. The poet mentions that

men feel superior so they freely roam in the outside world locking the women in houses in the name of tradition and customs. Complying with the tradition, a woman is to do only cooking and cleaning work at the home. At last, the poet raises her voice saying that men forget to know that women are talented and their thoughts and voice cannot be controlled by the so-called traditional stones.

*I am the one you crushed*

*With the weight of custom and tradition*

*Not knowing*

*That light cannot be hidden in darkness.*

The poet is crushed or oppressed with the heavy burden of custom and tradition. Now the poet generalizes the oppression to all the women. The traditional women are expected by their fathers to be locked in homes doing house work. The society and men fail to understand that a bright light cannot be hidden in darkness. The poet compares women to light and claims that their thoughts, love, care, wish, passion and determination cannot be destroyed by the darkness of the society.

The poet describes young men's attitude towards their mother. When a boy is young, he lies on the lap of his mother and picks flower. He enjoys the world with the help of his mother. But, when he grows up, he leaves his mother and goes away. He does not care or look after his mother. The son's ignorance pierces the heart of the mother and she becomes heartbroken. Hence, the poet says that such young man plants thorns on the lap where he enjoyed when he was young. The poet claims that though she is not treated fairly, not loved by her sons and father, and not looked after by her family, she will try to be the best in her life. She will be the light and fragrance to the family and society. She will not lose her striking features of womanhood.

Naheed describes the attitude of fathers. Fathers think that a girl-child is a burden and she should be safeguarded with chastity. So, they lock girl-children in home and do not allow them to go to achieve anything in the world. They consider the girl an object of trade and so they have no love towards their daughters. They give birth to the child and sell the girl to people for marriage. It is here the poet compares birth to buying and marriage to selling. By doing a business out of women, men want to earn money. In this process, they fail to understand that women too have emotions, desires, dreams and talents and they can achieve

anything they want. At last, the poet states that though she is treated like an object, she will do miraculous achievements such as walking on water. No restriction can forbid the women's determination towards achievements.

Fathers, the ruler of the family, think that girl-children should be sent out of home in the name of marriage. They feel that having a girl at home is a burden and they want her to marry someone in order to get more wealth, happiness and to get rid of the burden. In men's eye's, women are just materialistic objects. They give no sentimental value to women. So, the poet says that women have captive minds. She means that women's thoughts of happiness, free will, emotions and love are restrained and imprisoned by men and so women cannot be free. Even men want such imprisonment to women and they do not let them be free.

*I am the commodity you traded in,  
My chastity, my motherhood, my loyalty.*

After facing all the tortures from her family, the poet now talks about her place in the male chauvinistic society. In men's opinion, women are just a trading object with chastity, motherhood and loyalty. She considers those qualities are high qualities of women. However, family members are doing business by the qualities of the women. Hence, using women's attributes, men sell women and get money or peace or happiness.

Similarly, common men do business out of women's physical body. Usually, if a woman is expected to come to a public life, she can come as a model in advertisement or cinemas. There, she is expected to project herself a beautiful and lustful woman.

The poet opposes the two types of business of men using women. Instead, the poet, as a representation of womankind, wants to overcome all the troubles, tortures and oppression. She says that she will become free and achieve what she wants. Totally, the poet says that she wants freedom to be a real woman to express her passion, desires, will and skill.

The poet does not want to use her freedom to become an uncultured-woman in the advertisement or cinemas. She does not want to earn money by showing her half-naked and glamorous body. Towards the end of the poem, she firmly informs that she will not misuse her freedom as she respects the attributes of womanhood such as chastity, motherhood and loyalty to husband and family. Hence, at the end of the poem, she proclaims that she is not that kind of woman who sells her body to earn money.

The poet gives a picture of men's attitude towards women besides the passion of women. Though she uses the first person narration, she tries to generalize her thoughts as the voice of all the women. She emphasizes that women must be treated with love, care and justice. She claims that women are better than men if they are given freedom. Though men torture women, they do not realize that women can fight back and defeat men. Though women can fight back, they do not do it because they do not want to fight against their family members. Hence, she pleads the society to give freedom and understand woman's emotions.

Women play different roles in family and society as from daughter, sister, wife, mother and grand-mother, etc. She is expected to be well trained in house work and behave according to the expected norms of a wife and daughter-in-law. Thus, Gender inequalities exist because of discrimination in the family and societal institutions, and social, cultural, and religious norms that perpetuate stereotypes, practices and beliefs that are detrimental to women. The main transformative power of this poem is that empowerment of women is empowerment of her family, whole nation is empowered because ultimately it's the women who is responsible as a mother, as a creator of society, as a source of strength for retaining moral values and social ethos in the coming generation.

**Works Cited:**

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