

Traces of Standpoint Theory in Select Poems of Kishwar Naheed

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ABSTRACT

The fact is that South Asian nations have a history of keeping women from speaking up in public, but literature in the area does quite the opposite by serving as a voice for feminism. Kishwar Naheed, through the power of her pen, has contributed a lot to raising issues related to female subjugation and deprivation. The knowledge that results from situations and experiences that girls and women share is highlighted by the feminist Standpoint theory. The idea that our work—the activity in which we participate—shapes what we know and how we behave is central to Marxist theory, where this emphasis on experiences comes from. This study aims to identify the feminist underpinnings of a few poems by Pakistani-Urdu poet Kishwar Naheed. Her work is grounded in the experience of the subcontinent as a whole, allowing for a better understanding of the development of resistance against chauvinist revivals that impose their idea of a "submissive good woman" on subcontinental women. Her "transgression" poetry rejects the limitations imposed by a false, chauvinist spirituality and tries to sketch out the contours of the oppressed yet rebellious feminine personality.

Keywords: *Standpoint feminism, chauvinist, subjugation, phallogentric, retaliation.*

She is the recipient of the Sitar-e-Imtiaz, the Adamjee Award of Literature, the Best Translation Prize from Columbia University, and the coveted UNESCO Award for Children's Literature for her debut collection, *Lab-e-Goya* (Lips That Talk) (Shoib172). Born in Bulandshahar, Uttar Pradesh, and moving to Pakistan after the partition, Kishwar Naheed (1940) has been dubbed the Helen Cixous of South Asia. She is an experimental feminist and a prolific author who has published 12 volumes of poetry. She is also the editor of Mah-e-Naw magazine and the founder of the Hawa (Eve) organization, whose mission is to support women and make them financially equal to men (Akhtar; Junaidi; KN; Rekhta). She also translated *The Second Sex*, the feminist movement's holy book, into Urdu in 1982 under the title *Aurat ek Nafsiyati Mutala*. In the same way, Kishwar Naheed described how patriarchal, phallogentric dominance

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and monolithic approaches made women's lives into nothingness. She also constantly encourages the idea of financial independence through her writing (Khalid). Several times she had been recognized as a radical feminist, but she rejected this stereotypical notion in one of her interviews for The Hindu with Rakhshanda Jalil, which is mentioned in an article “Kishwar Naheed, 1940” published in the South Asian Literary Recording Projects, where she directly mentioned that she has a realist approach and could never let phallogocentric society mould or control her ideas in any context. She has also written her autobiography, *Ek Buri Aurat Ki Katha*, which was translated into English as *A Bad Woman's Story* by Durdana Sumroo.

Her poetic composition attracted and still grabs many researchers' attention for critical analysis and new findings such as “Eliciting the Theme of Radical Feminism in the Work of Kishwar Naheed.” By Roshan Kamran in which the researcher stretched upon her radicalism towards a feminist approach, “Patriarchy and Female Objectification in the Poetry of Faroukh Farrokhzad and Kishwar Naheed.” By Zeinab Mahmoudibaha and Mahdi Baghfalaki, here both the researchers, trace the attacks on female embodiment in the poem of Farrokhzad and Naheed; next is “Gender Inequality in Kishwar Naheed’s ‘I Am Not That Woman.’” By V. Nandani, in which Nandani although took a sort of cliché perspective, the microscopic scanning of her poem make this article worth reading, “Striving for Raising from Oppression: ‘Mashrooms’ and ‘The Grass is Really Like Me’” By Rajani C.V., “Vocabulary of Resistance: A Conversation with Kishwar Naheed.” By Mahwash Shoaib, both of these articles deal with resistance and retaliation, which are immensely portrayed by Naheed in her poems, and lastly, “Shameless Women: Repression and Resistance in *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry*.” By Neluka Silva, these articles and papers deal with how patriarchy dominates and operate to create collective unconsciousness in females, but Rutwa Nashikkar has analyzed poetry through the perspective of eco-feminism as he has written a paper called “Drawing Parallel of Oppression through the Lens of Eco-feminism in Women’s Poetry, Eco-feminist Movements, and The Way Out by Eradicating Dualism.” I try to relate Naheed's ideas with Marxist ideology and theory of Standpoint, in which every human and nonhuman have rights to say and interpret things in their own way and through their standpoint and understanding without any outer dominance and pressure.

This research will analyze Naheed’s poems of similar thoughts and sentiments, those being “The grass is like me”, “We Sinful Women”, “I Am Not That Woman” and “Talking to

Myself”, “collected and published in Dast-e-kais men Laila-Kulliyat in 2001, these four poems translated and edited by Rukhsana Ahmed and published in *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry* in 1991, all of these poems outspokenly and satirically talk about female stand and place in society and how their voice turns into a cry by first demeaning their place and then putting question on their own existence, which is nothing without male support and the dominance of patriarchy. Stakeholder feminism can be applicable here, which shows how women choose to tell their standpoint about sociological, cultural, and patriarchal dominance without fear, which becomes their way of telling their standpoint about sociological, cultural, and patriarchy without fear. Although based on Hegel's master-slave relationship, the Standpoint theory of Marxism basically paved the way for the empowerment of oppressed groups by giving value to their voice and experiences and maintaining their oppositional consciousness. It describes the relationship between knowledge production and power production (Bowell; Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science). One of the most well-known proponents of this idea is Sandra G. Harding. She contends that those in the highest or top class of the hierarchy do not have the same precise and accurate understanding of societal concerns or functions as those in the lower class. According to the statement made by Hegel in the book *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, oppression associated to class conflict may be better understood from the perspective of the oppressed person. “In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel's analysis the relation of master and servant... Marx's analysis of the different bases of ideology and knowledge can be applied to the standpoint of women” (Smith 78-79).

The basic premise of this Standpoint theory, which caught the attention of second wave feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, is that the privileged class manipulates the process of knowledge production and the process of meaning-making. It also contends that the oppressed class has much broader experiences of the ground reality of every kind, whether they are connected to the sociological, economic, or scientific sphere. To understand the entire reality of knowledge production, we must look at each and every standpoint, especially those that are oppressed, neglected, manipulated, or harassed, such as in feminist standpoint, we must listen and see female standpoints, and how they are manipulated by phallogocentric and patriarchal functioning of society through the standpoint of female voices and perspectives, further the perspective was shaped by Canadian Sociologist Dorothy Smith in her book *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (1989) and by American Sociologist Patricia Hill

Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990), in this way Standpoint Feminism came into being.

“We Sinful Women” shows the transgression ideas of Kishwar Naheed because she always argues about patriarchal nationalism and appeals to rectify the laws that demean the position of women in a reflexive revolutionary voice of transgression (Begum) through a feminist standpoint view. The anaphora ‘We Sinful Women’ presents how society judges women like Kishwar Naheed, who questions about every pitfall in a satirical way, making this poem a feminist anthem. The poem also retaliate the enforcement of Islamization that was prevalent during Zia’s regime (Silva 30).

The poem is divided into five parts. The first two lines of the poem depict the judgmental thoughts of society for those kinds of women who are never afraid to expose their intellect and question their ability by satirically calling all womenfolk ‘sinful.’ This satirical tone continues in the next three lines, which suggest that we neglect to do gender-specific roles, which is submission to the patriarchy assigned to us by the society. Women’s identity will always be in a questionable position; women's whole existence is to please men; they are just a piece of flesh, an object or property who has to serve their bodies to males for harvesting. These remarks of Naheed’s poetry show the similarity with the poem “A Soldier’s Wife Weep” by Kamala Wijeratne (Mahmoudibaha and Baghfalaki 8; S. 46087). In the next two stanzas, the poet describes those who take us for granted, take advantage of our work, and rule us under patriarchal notions as being considered superior, extraordinary, and kings, like when she says that those traitors who become the sellers of our hard work and get all the credits and money to rule over us, which is strongly put through her line “sell the harvests of our bodies” (Naheed 31), become the kings of the materialistic world.

The poem shows a strong voice of departure from the submission to phallogocentric social structure, as it is aptly and directly mentioned in the article named “The Impure Woman: Marginality and Detachment in the Poetry of Kishwar Naheed,” “The poem... announces that men can no more enforce their interpretations of social structure volens nolens, even if these women who do not conform to their interpretation of family or social structure are called impure.” (Hashmi 10) If a woman tries to inquire about illogical, baseless discriminations with their conscious standpoint for the sake of truth, then they will be scared by the sight of how others who also dared to question the prevalent patriarchal notion end up sacrificing their lives, and they just become the verbal stories of persecution and defeat; their tongues, which could speak, are now injured with impediments of submission and submissiveness (Naheed 31).

But now no more submission and ignorance have any place in this heart, which is filled with revolution, and these eyes will not shut without seeing the victory of this revolution, as she says. Here, she uses “night” in a metaphorical sense to describe how male-centric society fills the minds of women with darkness and ignorance, as she continues to assert that even night and the gloominess of pain and cruelty have no power to shut these eyes of logic and reason (Naheed 31). The poem is emotionally charged, full of passion for equality in every sphere; this poem became the song of devotion and a manifesto among the budding poets of Pakistan at that time. This poem deals with feminist politics in a larger context and how nationalism turns into mal nationalism in a satirical way (Kamran 22–29). Through the constant use of run-on lines and anaphora such as the phrase ‘we sinful women’ running throughout the poem like a chant shows a kind of slap in the face of patriarchal society just like Fehmida Riaz’s “Chadar or Char Diwari” which challenged the male dominance especially at the time of Zia’s regime (Pakistan: We Sinful Women), Naheed perhaps trying to show her restlessness, declaration, and oath against the primitive mind-sets in a very clear standpoint view, is not only her voice, but it is a voice of all womenfolk, and especially voices of female poets. As Anu Anejain her book *Feminist Theory and Aesthetic Within a perspective From South Asia* quotes many mutinous writers such as Fahmida Riaz, Ishrat Aafreen, Sara Shagufta and Zehra Nigah, and she said that we can track the poetic similarity of these writers in Naheed’s poems (161).

There are two translations of “I am Not That Woman” One is by Mehmood Jamal in *The Distance of a Shout* (2001), and the other is by Rukhsana Ahmad in *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu English Poetry* under the title “Who Am I” which is the direct translation of the Urdu version “Mai Kon Houn”. In this poem, she iterates about the place and roles given by society to women, such as dutiful daughter, caring sister, obedient wife, and sacrificing mother, and then takes them for granted without concerning themselves with their comfort and identity. She retaliates by saying that her existence is not limited to “selling you socks and shoes”; she too has intellect to question. In the very first stanza, she argues about two different images of men’s selfishness and carelessness, especially how men hide women in “walls of stones” and roam freely “as the breeze”, The phrase ‘that woman’ shows the preconceived conception of women in a male-centric, chauvinistic society (Awad 109; K.).

Throughout the poem, she responds to these kinds of systematic subjugations from a liberated feministic standpoint, stating that she is not the type of woman you envision as an ideal

portrayal of submission, but rather belongs to those whom society hides behind four walls in the name of respect, tradition, and culture. Although men used to get all of their sexual pleasure from them, spending time on their laps picking flowers, in exchange they get subordination and subjugation in the shape of coals, thorns, and dominance, none of which can suffocate her aroma (Naheed 34). This demonstrates the male-centric society's conspiracy, but it cannot prevent women's will and hope to live free one day through her power of intellect (Mendoza), as she says and mentions in *The Distance of Shout* edited by Asif Farrkhi, where we can see her multi-directional approach to treating problems related to women in general because in most cases prostitutes get treatment like this where after having sexual satisfaction men usually turn the tables. Here, we can also see how closely these ideas resemble those of Manto's prostitute Saugandhi from the story "Hatak" (Insult), who consistently receives insults and false promises from Madhav (one of her customers) in exchange for her services, but who ultimately retaliates and defeats this kind of sentimentalism.

In the third stanza, she said the manly world also sold us, sometimes as a wife and sometimes literally as a prostitute, after a long conviction of girl children in her father's home. They get sold in the name of marriage. Being a male, fathers also repeat and continue the history of subjugation without caring about their daughter's emotions, desires, and talent because they see girl children as "female bodies" who need to be trained in such a way that they cannot think about freedom; further, she argues that still women have the power to fight and can attain miraculous achievements such as walking on water (Nandhini 218–219). Here her idea about marriage seems similar to that of J. S. Mill in *The Subjugation of Women*, where he says, "Marriage being the destination appointed by society for women... Originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband." (53). Naheed uses the phrase 'captive minds' to show the mentality of both patriarchal society, whose thinking is confined to subjugating women, and the mind of females, who can't think beyond the boundaries created by phallogocentric society. From the very first day of a girl child after her, she is considered a burden or a thing to pass on from one house to another on a given and required time, which we can see in many literary works such as *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin, in which even at the time of partition, both Satya and Roop married to one man to serve him because both the girls were burdens for their parents, as accurately says Naheed that these kinds of 'captive minds will never be free (34–36).

Lastly, she concludes her ideas in a tone of retaliation with her standpoint view that she is no longer that woman whom society fancied as a deity of submission or a body and a flesh of product to be sold in the name of motherhood, so now the narrative, knowledge production, and discourse should be changed as she declares that it is her duty instead of anyone else's responsibility to deal with her chastity, motherhood, and loyalty (Naheed 36).

This thought-provoking poem is filled with poet persona; literally, there is only one voice, but if we see it through the lens of applied meaning, we can easily find the voice of all women folk. Naheed tries to imply that in this dualistic society, men create and plan moral values according to their comfort, in which women have to survive and function accordingly (Naeem). She uses anaphora for emphasis when she says “not knowing” in Mehmood Jamal's translated version and “for you never knew” in Rukhsana Ahmed's translated version. The title is very catchy because it starts with who she is not and ends with who she really is or all the women across the border. The title refers to the strong assertive approach of the poet, through which she tries to remove the restrictions of gender-based hypocrisy by raising her voice against the objectification of female bodies (Unni 16).

The next poem is “The Grass is really like me” in which she metaphorically presents herself (womenfolk) as grass, because like grass, women also live under the feet of the dominant section of society. Whenever grass or women are trying to unfurl or raise their voices, suddenly the lawnmower (which metaphorically represents phallogocentric society) cuts it short and gives it a velvety shape to subdue it, in the same way women also get suppressed by the society, and from the very birth of a girl, the patriarchal society starts conditioning their minds and shaping their conscience with a sense of timidity, conservative behavior, and a primitive mind. The lawnmower, the lawn mower, cuts them, a sense of timidity, conservative behavior, and primitive mind set. Being a girl, Naheed also had a hard time of struggling in her childhood to get an education, but through courage, power, and determination she achieved her goal (TGIRLM), as she describes that as soon as women start realizing their power and potential, the chauvinistic mind-sets start suppressing and shaping their minds for submission because they are obsessed with flattening them into velvet (Naheed, 41).

Being a female writer who always ready to target hidden and burning truths of society she herself faced lots of humiliation and questionable remarks as she herself confessed this in one of her interviews which shows whatever she writes it's not mere imagination instead she herself

feels that way, interview was published in an online website Herald. She said that although her husband used to be her friend, he got worried about her writing such kind of poetry. Her husband's name was Yousuf Kamran, and even sometimes he discouraged her from writing anything. Her Nazms especially made him nervous as they usually dealt with burning issues in a striking way, so she decided that she would not show her any of her work before publication (Khali que). In the same letter, Ismat Chughtai also tackled the situation when an arrest warrant reached her home in front of her husband.

Ultimately, neither nature nor a chauvinistic approach can tame women under their influential politics. Women and grass both will grow because it is nature's law and there is a limit for everything. We can also examine this poem through the lens of eco-feminism in Indian context, such as the movements like “Chipko Andolan”, and “Save the Narmada Movement” in Gujarat, both initiated by women. Here, her poem tries to break the binary and dualism by taking nature to justify the feministic point of view that both women and nature suffer silently from dominance, but they both prove their existence, so nature creates a kind of feminine utopia of retaliation (Nashikkar). She goes on to give advice to women. She says, “Let the society make their way to discriminate against you; never lose your courage by accepting scorching defeat.” All a lawnmower or a dominating male can do is turn grass into straw, but we will grow again and again. As she finalized her thoughts by saying that this society or the whole world, say, will continuously challenge us and make every path for us insufferable, but we should not stop growing and spreading our roots as a way of retaliation and reconciliation with freedom, the poem also shows the colloquial tone when she says “take my advice...”(Naheed 41).

She gives advice that is reminiscent of the well-known verse by Asrarul Haq Majaz, “This piece of cloth is very beautiful on your forehead, but it would have been better if you could have made a flag of victory and knowledge out of it.” (tere maathe pe ye aanchal bhut khoob hai lekin / tu is aanchal se ek parcham bana leti to acha tha) so, using the lovely metaphor of “grass” the speaker demonstrates throughout the poem how phallogocentric society attempts to “level down” women in all spheres of culture, including religion, tradition, and even scientific advancement. She also claims that those who accept the defeat are actually just straw and not proper grass (Naheed 41). Those that demonstrate their discontent with limited possibilities, on the other hand, either turn into grass or mature sensible people (V. 69).

Although the poem ends with the same sentence with which it started, the thoughts got changed. It starts by describing the situation as if nothing was going to change, but ends with advice, hope, and determination. Here we can see how her way of using anaphora changed because initially she used the phrase ‘grass is also like me, but she ends with “grass is really like me” which shows that when she was describing the traits of suppression, she used the word ‘also, but when she says she will deal with these patriarchal impediments, she uses the adverb ‘really’ to emphasize, which specifically shows her maturity of writing and her dead serious way of telling burning truths.

Lastly, in “Talking to Myself”, this poem is more of an agony, an interior monologue, and a song for freedom from the boundaries created and bound by the male-centric world of discrimination. Here, the thought of the poetess travels from the specific to the general because, as an outspoken surrealistic writer, she faced numerous irrational critiques. She began by saying that punish her for her writings about dreams of a present and future world of freedom, especially in the third line when she says that she is one who fearlessly and boldly has written a book that is filled with obsession for freedom. Here she might be talking about her autobiography, and perhaps she is trying to defend her writings, which are full of the voice of protest, as it’s being said about her in the book *Feminist Theory and the Aesthetics Within: A Perspective from South Asia* by Any Aneja that she is known for her dauntless critique of rigid customs and stereotypical notions, specifically targeting those tyrants who are responsible for female enslavement and servitude (169). She continues with her anaphora and says punish her because she has written the truth about patriarchy; she continues with anaphora “punish me” to strikingly attack the essentialist ideology of society by saying that punish her because she dares to show her knowledge, because she challenges illogical hatred against weaker sex by making them weak through collective unconsciousness, and because she liberates women from distractive illusions and the truth, as she says that she tried to free womanhood from the madness of deceiving darkness and illiteracy (Naheed 55). Here the word ‘deluded’ shows the disadvantage of womanhood in the hands of chauvinistic mind sets. Finally, she warns them not to provoke and to stop pulling the strings so much that they (the patriarchal mindset) will surely meet their ends very soon. After this warning, she ends the poem by saying that you should hurry up before your sentence for punishment will end because, according to them, she deserves punishment as she doesn’t follow societal norms and she breathes and speaks freely.

Thus, we can say that in all of her poems she depicts how women suffer with collective unconscious and the way her retaliating voice deals with it; that clearly and undoubtedly shows her standpoint view towards patriarchal notions, which are prevalent in many other female poets such as Amrita Pritam and Kamala Das, but not in the way Naheed presents, which certainly illustrates her strong and direct resisting voice through her standpoint.

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