

I am not that Woman By Kishwar Naheed

I am not that Woman is a poem directed towards the empowerment of women. Through examining the treatment many eastern cultures uphold towards the female race, Naheed boldly concludes that women are being oppressed and deserve to be respected, you can view the full poem here. *I am not that Woman* contrasts both the explicit and discreet ways in which women are oppressed in society. Through a partially feminist lens, Naheed makes the point that women deserve respect and they are not commodities. In a large part of the east, women are oppressed explicitly by being locked behind doors and being told that they cannot become anything in life. Of course this cannot be generalized to every country and city, but many eastern cultures do carry this mentality even today. This explicit oppression may be absent in the west but Naheed states that women are being discreetly oppressed in western cultures, by having their worth tied to their bodies. The beauty of women is more often than naught used in advertisements to sell a variety of products, Naheed makes a very valid point that this too is a form of oppression. Linking a woman's value and self-worth to her body is a form of oppression in and of itself. *I am not that Woman* is an empowering poem reminding the world that women deserve respect, and more importantly, women should appreciate and confidently respect themselves.

I am not that Woman Analysis

The first stanza addresses the oppression women face in both the western culture and eastern culture. Naheed takes on the voice of a female persona, which can easily be seen as her own voice, especially due to the fact that her roots are from the eastern part of the world. She blatantly refuses to be seen as that woman who sells socks and shoes. This is referring to a model or actress who allows herself to be photographed dressed in lucrative clothing in order to promote a commercial product. In today's society displaying your body, especially for women, has become a means of earning awe and praise from everyone around us. Nearly every girl in the west, if not the world, is bent on perfecting her outward appearance so that she can show it off when she goes out. Naheed targets this point and tries to bring to light that forcing a woman to believe that her self-worth is immediately linked to her body is a strong form of oppression that we are failing to address in society. She moves on to discuss the equally, if not more disgusting oppression that occurs in the east. Men lock the women indoors and forbid them from leaving the house. In the more extreme regions of the east, even a woman walking outside alone is considered immodest and disgraceful. If the main purpose of men keeping their women indoors was to protect them from the dangers of the street this would be understandable to some degree, but Naheed is making it clear that the main purpose that women are locked indoors is because women are considered inferior and a burden. Women are entirely objectified and at extremes are not even seen as humans anymore, merely modes of receiving pleasure and satisfaction. Naheed addresses the hypocritical nature in which men are free to go wherever they please without any care or question while women are literally locked behind stone in an attempt to silence their mind.

Naheed takes an empowering approach and likens womankind to light in the darkness. She states that no matter how much the men force her to remain inside, no matter how they try to replace her flowers of hope and aspiration with thorns and chains of contempt and oppression they will not succeed in silencing her mind, because she is not that woman that can be fooled into believing that she is only worth her beauty, that her body defines her status as someone who is somehow inferior to men. In the second stanza Naheed uses a metaphor, referring to herself or rather all womankind as light. Naheed uses symbolism here as well, referring to her character as the flowers that were in her lap, and the restrictions and harsh words addressed to her as embers and chains.

The third and fourth stanza seem like they are referring to a woman who was literally sold into slavery but a closer examination of the eastern culture can allow us to conclude that Naheed is referring to forced marriages. In the eastern culture daughters and women are considered to be a burden because they do not have many job opportunities and are therefore entirely reliant on their caregivers for most, if not all of their lives. More importantly when a girl is 'married off' by her parents, her parents are expected to give the groom a very large dowry, many times this accounts to thousands of dollars' worth of furniture and clothes. It is for this reason that women are considered a burden in the eastern culture. Naheed is almost vehemently stating that they trade off women, telling them it is not chaste to stay unmarried for too long, and happily wash their hands from the burden of financially supporting them any further. She states that this female persona may have been forced to drown by being given off in marriage like a burden, but she still refuses to except their definition of her. She can walk on water while she is drowning is beautiful imagery to describe that she refuses to give up even in a seemingly impossible situation. She refuses to drown in their doubts and claims about her capabilities. Naheed concludes the fourth stanza with stating that the captive minds of the individuals who degrade women can never be free. They may be trying to chain her mind down but it is infact their own minds that are chained.

In the final stanza, the female persona elaborates that she refuses to be that half naked woman selling products on a poster. She is stating that she refuses to disrespect herself and her body, refuses to objectify her body for others to see and receive pleasure. She states that now she will allow her character to blossom free by respecting herself as a mother and as a loyal chaste human being.

I am not that Woman is a liberating poem which strongly urges women from all cultures to respect themselves and not allow themselves to be oppressed in any form. Naheed exposes the disturbing mentality of many eastern cultures that women are simply burdens and objects. Naheed instills the ideology that women are mothers, they are a light in the darkness and that they are so much more then the bodies that they are in. Naheed reminds us to focus on what is inside of us and even in our superficial society, remind ourselves to respect our bodies and who we are as people.

Poetic Devices

The poem contains a lot of harsh consonant sounds. Look how often the letter C appears. You could almost describe it as a cacophony. The differing line lengths also help to create this sense of discord which helps to set the tone of the poem. The poem takes advantage of

figurative language to create some powerful and evocative metaphors. For instance in the first stanza where the line “free as the breeze” is used. This is an example of personification.