



**A FEMINIST READING OF
SELECTED POEMS OF
KISHWAR NAHEED**

ABSTRACT

The essay is an attempt to place the poetry of Kishwar Naheed within the modern feminist discourse by examining how it corresponds to various feminist theoretical constructs and displaces traditional phallogocentric modes of writing and versification in her inimitable style of poetry. The essay will try to analyze the ideological moorings of the feminist poet and explore whether or not she borrows from the popular discourse of another transgressive school: The Progressive Writers Association. The objective is to read the selected poems closely and by an investigation of their syntactic and semantic transgressions observe the pragmatic shift in her poetry and analyze whether she is able to bring in a fresh perspective of the collective experience of the women in Post-Colonial Pakistan in specific and the sub continental women in general.

Huzaifa Pandit

Feminism- I (43)

Introduction:

*Le de ke apne paas faqat ek nazar to hai,
Kyon dekheN zindagi ko kisi ki nazar se ham.
-Sahir Ludhainvi*

*The sight is the only asset left to us
Why to examine life then
From others' view?*

Identity in light of identification and dislocation of marginality has been one of the key concerns of feminist literature. The distinction between 'Woman' – a commonising hegemonic identity of 'Other' carved out of Victorian colonial standards (I speak in terms of the sub continental perception of woman) and select misogynist ancient textual interpretations have long been in conflict with the 'Women' – the real product of flesh and blood retrieved through diverse cultural discourses like writing, cinema and narration, is a concern that is irremediably tied to any theorization of the feminine. The difference between the two concepts – one based on collective stereotypic social phallogocentric memory and the other on a sustained investigation into the feminine world with reference to its emotional, psychical and physical aspects, is a key tenet of the feminist theoretical canon. The distinction of woman and women must however or rather is, be understood as a differentiation in terms of "qualifiers of sexual difference" as Cixous calls it to prevent occurrence of the confusion "man/masculine, woman/feminine: for there are men who do not repress their femininity, women who more or less forcefully inscribe their masculinity." Indeed the scope of this inquiry is not limited strictly to the feminist circle on inquiry. Rather it spills into the study of sexuality, culture, nationality and other academic disciplines as well. It is evident then that any comprehensive 'feminist study' must correspond to various theoretical investigations and integrate them within its framework to arrive at any effective theory of feminine identity and marginalization. However for less challenging aims e.g. analyzing a specific literary work with the aim of unravelling its feminist affiliations and mark it with reference to the epistemological consciousness of the age it was composed in, we may settle for a less intensive approach.

My endeavour in this essay is a similar one. I propose to examine selected poems of the Pakistani Urdu poet Kishwar Naheed to unravel the feminist contours of her work. Her work is rooted in the experience of the subcontinent feminine – its issues, challenges and concerns, and therefore allows for a greater understanding of the evolution of the phenomenon of resistance against surges of chauvinist revival that foists its notion of a 'submissive good woman' unto the sub continental woman and more so in the Islamic theocracy of Pakistan. Her poetry is an explosive repudiation of the constraints placed by a hypocritical chauvinist religiosity rooted deep in an all-male social society and attempts to outline the contours of the subjugated but rebellious feminine identity through her 'transgressive' poetry. The transgression occurs not only at semantic level (description of female sexuality, female body and erasure of imposed collective identity) but also at the syntactical level as she breaks from the conventional ghazal and lyrical nazm to azaad nazm or prose poems in order to evolve her own unique expression. The poems under discussion are: Censorship, Ghazal, Talking To Myself, The grass is really like me, and We Sinful Women (trans Rukhsana Ahmed).

The cataclysmic consequences of the partition of the sub-continent have been the subject of much scrutiny before- feminist and otherwise. The colonial emasculation project of the uncivilized other and related masculine anxieties were only exacerbated in this two nation theory propounded under patriarchal father figures - Gandhi mentored Nehru and Jinnah and thus the whole religion and nationality is masculinized while women just became markers as nationalism and masculinity played on their bodies. The manifestations of this masculine anxiety to assert its nationalistic masculinity that started from the pre independence customs of sati and purdah system have evolved in various manifestations throughout the post-independence period e.g. honour killing spiraling rape and molestation statistics and a general upward trend in crimes against women. With the onset of the information revolution and the hybridity of fantasy and reality, reflected by the mushrooming of pornographic eroticism in film and popular literature yielding a highly eroticized distorted caricature of woman as a sexual being.

A cursory examination of the “entertainment sections” of the sub continental media will reveal sufficient proof of the same with dominant themes like Sherlyn Chopra, Veena Malik and Shahzad Anjum reviled and glorified equally for what is essentially bawdy exposure of body in the name of female liberation, sexist deodorant ads, daily soaps like the dubbed Turkish soap “Ask-I Memnu,” or “Forbidden Love”. This Soap has been especially popular in Pakistan and features buxom Turkish beauties in miniskirts, while depicting the antics of the super-rich, including love triangles and incestuous relationships, all dubbed in Urdu.¹ Not to be outdone you have our own indigenous variant MTV Splitsvilla” and in portraying sexless domesticated spineless caricatures both countries share the honours: Zaib of Silvatain aired on ARY Digital, Kumkum from Kumkum: ek pyaara sa Bandhan –aired on Star Plus are just two examples. In this televised world Women then have to encounter newer adversaries that grasp the magnitude of this information and serotyping barrage and suggest/evolve counter discursive techniques to interrogate and displace these markers of female identity. In the vein of Showalter, the feminist or gynocentric critic must map the “precise cultural locus” of the adversary in question and thereby examine its interaction with the women such that its nature and consequences may be plotted with accuracy.

It follows then that a thorough interrogation of cultural hierarchies and the position of women in these hierarchies will be obtained. To engage with these various phallogocentric identities and recover a regenerative identity of the feminine from this chaos of identity then is a herculean task. This brief introduction of the historical progression of the foregrounding of phallogocentric superiority was necessary in order to locate the conditions that exist apriori in the post-independence globalized sub-continent and read them as symptomatic of an unbroken chain of phallogocentric historical continuity. To rebel against the process of hegemonic co-option is therefore the primary duty of the feminist poet and thus we locate the necessity and significance of a Kishwar Naheed and her corpus of works.

II) The Politics of transgression and Shameless women

*Kishwar Naheed,
The desire to see you silent
Billows up even from the grace.
But speech is urgent*

*When listening is a crime.
Now I can see
Expressions which daunted me,
Strike fear everywhere*

Self-titled poem: Kishwar Naheed

In the introduction to her seminal autobiography *Buri Aurat Ki Katha* (the story of a Bad Woman) Kishwar Naheed notes that the narrative does not concern an individual but is the expression of a whole class, whose history has been swept under the layers of social amnesia regulated by a strict patriarchal politico-religious code. The theme of retrieving the history of women from the myriad of history is one of the key concerns of Naheed's poetry. Her poetry is replete with symbols of regeneration after repression and breaking through the fissures of patriarchal interpretations of religion and morality. Consider the poem: The Grass is really like me, where the simile of grass is employed to indicate a habitual transgression and displacement of patriarchal heteronormativity. The note of transgression is evident in these lines:

*The grass is also like me
It has to unfurl underfoot to fulfil; itself
But what does it prove by getting soaked:
A scorching sense of shame
Or the heat of emotion.
The grass is also like me
As soon as it can raise its head
The lawn owner,
Obsessed with flattering it into velvet
Mows it down again.
How you strive and endeavor
To level woman down too!*

The poem is effective not only on account of the self-explanatory operation of the simile but rather it must be looked as a displacement operative at various levels. The first transgression occurs at the level of structure. Moving away from the traditional ghazal mode which relies on autonomy of meaning enshrined in ritualistic imagery like wine, beloved and rival set up in highly formalized rhyming structures. The ghazal carries within itself its baggage of a *rekhti* background – a form of verse in which the narrator is feminized and fetishized as imbued with a homoerotic sexuality, a heterosexist male's lesbian fantasy. The choice of nazm is therefore a clear break from the sensual erotic figure that underpins the ubiquitous masculine narrator's attestation of her femininity. A reading of the transgression in terms of Edward Adrener's 'Muted group theory' expanded in a feminist context by Cheris Kramarae - former professor and director of Women's Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, would not be out of place here.

Kramarae posits that the dictionaries need to be rescued from male created meaning as women perceive the world "differently from men because of women's and men's different experience and activities rooted in the division of labor" Deriving from Structuralist theory of language being an arbitrary human phenomenon, it then follows that men can communicate easily as compared to women. Taking the argument further by an understanding of the Symbolic interactionism theory which posits that "Humans do not sense their environment directly, instead, humans define the situation they are in. An environment may actually exist, but it is our definition of it that is important. Definition does not simply randomly happen; instead, it results

from ongoing social interaction and thinking.” Since definition and labelling is usually and historically a masculine construct, the masculine has a marked advantage over the feminine.

It is easy to see therein that the ghazal and its cousin the metered ‘nazm’ (the closest Urdu equivalent to Ode) both are typically masculine in nature. Naheed therefore chooses the azaad nazm – prose poem which does away with rhyme and meter, as her medium for expression. At an implicit performative level the turning away from a regimented form to a fluid form is suggestive of the liberation from and repudiation of the prescriptive normativity of hetero-patriarchal cultures. The choice of labelling the simile is also integral – grass instead of verdure. The difference is not as stark in English as in Urdu where it flouts the inviolable rule of maintaining decorum in verse. A typical civilized word for grass in Urdu verse would be ‘sabza’ rather than the mundane ghaas. In opting for the mundane Naheed is disrupting the historical continuity of the ‘shareef’ or muslim gentle woman – thereby appropriating the form to be marked with the ‘vulgar’ autobiographical style’ of a woman who goes unabashedly as a bad woman.

It is important to trace the disruption here in terms of not only its feminist contours but its post-colonial contours too. As Khushwant Singh portrayed in *Train to Pakistan* the immediate post-colonial sub-continent betrayed an anxiety of religious identification which was marked male on account of the public scrutiny of the penis. Since the only fool proof test of ascertaining the other masculine’s religious identity was the circumcised or uncircumcised penis, the somatic basis of the ethnic identity is foregrounded. And therefore the identity of a person depends on the “proper body mutilation” and proper performance of religious practice rather than the subject’s interiority. Ayesha Jalal in her book: *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850*, remarks in this context that “One symbolic meaning that became attached to Muslim women in this period of national uncertainty was “the affirmation of identity against the ‘other’ (for instance, Hindus or the West) and the preservation of group unity and culture in the face of swift and often threatening change.” A crucial aspect of Pakistani nationalist discourse propagated by the state maintained that women preserved indigenous values and cultural authenticity”.

This aspect is adequately treated in the poem: “A palace of Wax” where the violent partition of the sub-continent serves as the background for examining the feminine vulnerability. The poem dramatizes the repressed feminine anxiety through a series of images that include dreams, lightning, livestock and death. The poem neatly juxtaposes two phases of the feminine anxiety – before and after partition. The psyche of the narrator’s mother is populated with graphic phantasmagoria – so graphic that she is unable to recall them in the morning. The significance of dreams as posited by the psychoanalytic school is immense as it becomes a marker of the repressed reality or desired reality. Both senses of the symbol are evident here as would be clear from an analysis of the symbol of lightning.

Lightning is the product of a massive electrostatic charge from a highly charged unstable cloud manifesting within itself a tremendous amount of energy and light. Often used in terms of pathetic fallacy to indicate a traumatic or a moment of extreme importance, lightning here could be extended to imply the expression or discharge of patriarchal masculine anxiety about the ‘proper religion’ of the other especially the masculine. The reduction of religion to the masculine or the exclusion of women from proper religion owes its genesis to the fact that the true marker of religion in moments of extreme identity anxiety (usually riots) has been the physical exhibition of the penis in accordance with the binary circumcision/Muslim, Christian, Jew and uncircumcised/Hindu, sikh. With women the marker of religion exists at the sartorial level – the bindi, mangalsutra and the application of sindhoor. Religion therefore depends in such

moments not on the belief and faith of the modern subject which modify his interiority but on proper emasculation of male body and performance of 'proper' religious signifiers like the recital of kalima or a verse from a holy book. The identity of woman is derived from her association with the male as the wife or daughter of a Hindu/Muslim/Sikh/Christian etc. The dream that transmits vacuous expressions is the result of this blanking and mitigation of the feminine identity which haunts the lanes of subconscious as shadows of a deep traumatic loss and despair.

This connects directly then to Spivak's assertion of the subaltern's problem in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" wherein she notes that the subaltern often makes an attempt at self-representation, but such a representation turns to deaf ears. The listener fails to recognize it because it does not fit in with the expected notion of representation. Subsequently we find the subaltern mother unable to express or represent as she –the subaltern has no power the means of communication required to speak out and protest. Spivak like many other theorists has noted that independence hardly improved the lot of the sub continental women as patriarchy manifested itself in diverse forms. Partition merely proved to be a conduit of patriarchal energy unleashed on women as they were raped before being murdered while men were only murdered. Thus the damage to women was at two levels – the physiological and the psychological as the clouds of patriarchy divest themselves of pent up energy created by the colonizer with its division and rule policy.

The psychological damage follows from the *Rape trauma syndrome*- a cluster of abnormal behaviour that includes disruptions to normal physical, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal behavior which are on the same footing as Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorderⁱⁱ. It is hardly surprising to note then that lightning flashes on the same day when the mother has a vivid foreshadowing of the fate befalling her and her class in general as the Radcliffe Line is etched in blood of communities from both sides. Drowning in the river is both a factual statement as well as a metaphorical device representing an unprecedented low point in the sub continental history – the woman drowned in a river of blood, semen and hate, a combination of Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Sufia Zanolbia Hyder in Rushdie's *Shame*.

The consequences of the lightning are equally intriguing. In an interesting twist, lightning has been gendered and shown as "she lightning". The gendering is crucial to the reproduction of the myth that it is always a woman's fault – she had been asking for it, to justify and legitimize violence against women. So when lightning brings financial ruin to the family (loss of the buffalo) or social demotion (married lady to a widow), it is the woman who is invoked by traditional patriarchy as having invited the troubles by way of her immoral and disobedient behaviour. The pronoun 'she' therefore by appropriating the responsibility of the women transforms it into an ironic trope – a mea culpa that exposes the hypocrisy and falsity that induces such a confession and hence decenters the myth and forces the reader to examine the import of this substitution.

This juncture represents the axis on which the poem hinges as now the narrator too experiences the trauma and anguish of neglect and violence. Now the conditioned converted narrator is able to decode the dream of the mother and thereby becomes acutely self-conscious of her gender and the phantasmagorias associated with it. She realizes that the subaltern expression will be derided by hetero-patriarchal society and therefore does not divulge the key to decode feminine suffering.

'Anti –Clockwise' is a direct product of this suppression and vividly describes in unambiguous terms of how masculine anxiety can never be satisfied completely as the roots of patriarchy are too ingrained in the subject that it is virtually impossible for it to recognize the other or margins

and concede the center to it. The description of motion is particularly poignant as it suggests a deviation from normativity as the passage of time as represented on clock is in the contrary direction and hence the term clockwise. To resist this normative motion and challenge the hegemony of this culturally sanctioned delusion is unimaginable and transgressive in every sense of the word.

The poem employs an interesting structure – four stanzas demarcating the ideal woman as it decenters each notion, and the last two lines provide a direct displacement of the ideal by locating the exact cause of the masculine obsession with servile femininity. The language of the poem may surprise and not agree with many western readers; however the third world will quickly identify that each stanza defines one aspect of the stereotypical woman. The poem applies metonymy effectively to delineate and displace each aspect of the stereotype. The first stanza examines the issue of gaze and hence the usage of eyes. The subject here is the masculine gaze which is at once a yardstick of objectification as well as intimidation executed through the phenomenon of Blazon where each anatomical part is highlighted in the vein of traditional love poetry. The downcast eyes are an integral symbol of the discourse of *haya* - a combination of modesty and grace, which regulates the life of women in the fundamentalist patriarchal religious discourse. The issue came to greater prominence during the tenure of Zia-ul-Haq who embarked on the Islamisation of the Pakistan society. This dogmatic orthodoxy demeans women and relegates them to the status of shoe soles, to be trod beneath the feet of a patriarchal heteronormative society. However this relegation does not satiate the masculine anxiety as the woman still retains a vivid perception of the universe around here being acutely aware of their loss and can internalize this loss to portray a la Rani Himayun in *Shame* or Hester Payne in *The Scarlet Letter*.

The next object of gaze is the nose which again is considered to be one of the major markers of feminine beauty. A study by Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis published in 2005 showed that symmetrical faces which require a symmetrical nose as a pre requisite earn 5 % more than those whose faces are asymmetricalⁱⁱⁱ. Such being the state of inequality even in case of men, the distinction is marked more in the realm of gender. The rubbing of nose in dust and thereby mutilating it is a typical male gesture aimed at quashing any masculine anxiety about sharing the beauty of the female with a rival male. The rubbing of nose in the ground also carries a religious connotation as it is the difference between a simple prostration and *Sajda* – the part of Namaz where the worshipper rubs his nose in the ground, as a mark of reverence for the deity. The act of woman prostrating thereof imbues the male with a divine element such that he becomes the traditional ‘God’ for the feminine who relies on his whims and fancies for satiation of her needs. The act therefore has a major symbolic significance and the failure of this act to placate patriarchal ego is a telling and self-explanatory commentary in itself.

Lips are scrutinized next in an ironic tone that shifts the gaze to their functionality. The lips as a property of women liable to be exploited by the patriarchal masculine has been treated adequately in Tess of the D’Urbervilles where her rape by Alec is attributed to her full red lips. The drying of lips such that they become soul less needs to be understood in the tradition of the Urdu ghazal where lips are often compared to the red rose. One of the most enduring images of Urdu ghazal is the panegyric by Mir Taqi Mir:

*Naazuki unki lab ki kya kahiye
Pankhadi ik gulaab ki si hai –*

How can verse paint the
Delicate tint of her full lips?

They resemble the petals of a rose
Bathed in fresh dew. (trans me)

The verse then revolts against this notion of beauty and points out that even the consummation of the beauty of her lips on account of fading youth and singing songs of masculine praise, the mutant lips still terrify the masculine, as the withering of the rose lips mirrors his neglect and ruin masculinity imposed upon it by caging it. As old man Time reaps the beauty of the woman, the masculine which has viewed it all along as a sexual attention and thence bestowed attention upon it, shifts its gaze to other greener pastures. This is an attestation then of the claim of social scientists that communication is not entirely a verbal act but a semiotic act, and true to the structural legacy the signifier will testify to the masculine guilt and oppression while also concealing an anxiety about legitimizing the said act(s).

The next stanza too relies on the traditional ghazal imagery of 'paazeb' commonly known as payal or anklets. It enjoys a marked place in the discourse of ghazal as a romantic symbol as is evident by the popularity of the Bollywood song: *is reshmi paazeb ki chankaar kay sadqay^{iv}* (For the sake of the silken anklet). The replacement of the anklet with the steel chain is an image borrowed from the poetry of poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz^v from Progressive Writers association who crusaded for the cause of the working class. In the writing of Progressive Writers who are heavily influenced by Marxist Discourse, the chained ankle becomes a relic of the impediments in the way of love. While in the traditional ghazal, the beloved wears the anklet as a mark of beauty and grace, the progressive poet reverses the gender role. The 'payal' becomes the locked fetters and a symbol of his fidelity as it transforms into a regalia – an honour bestowed upon the chosen few who have decided to dedicate their life for the beloved (Upliftment of the working class). This borrowing clearly places Naheed in the corpus of anti-establishment poets and conditions her point of view which is evident in her irreverential attitude towards traditional normative symbolism. The image then is a marker of her sympathy towards the subaltern which counts women as among a significant constituency. The steel chain and the associated notions of servility and criminality (for hardcore criminals are incarcerated in chains), indicates the misogynist views of hetero-patriarchal society which excludes women from subjectivity and places it conveniently in the realm of other.

The last two lines connect well with the symbol of Grass used in the poem "The Grass is really like me". These lines explicitly demarcate the root cause of this 'hetero patriarchal anxiety' as it harbors deep rooted fear of losing out on its superior power in the power hierarchy. The freedom of women will entail allowing the woman to realize her true place in societal hierarchies and thereby unleash her boundless jouissance. Any manifestation of the subaltern's boundless jouissance, to speak in post-colonial terms, is problematic for the colonizer as it implies a radical shift in the temporalities of the historical discourse and thereby allow the colonized to access and destabilize the center rather than remain content powerless on the periphery. It is therefore imperative upon the colonizer male to take recourse to the rhetoric of modesty and shame while locating it entirely on the axis of feminine body, such that the hegemonic power of hetero-patriarchy remains unchallenged. This in basic terms is the whole crux of the gender politics espoused by Naheed – the challenge for representation and participation. To quote Weber, Politics is involved where power relations exist and there is an attempt to alter those power relations – a continuous tussle to legitimize and delegitimize existing power structures which exclude certain sections on the pretext of their being incapable or unnatural to accept and maintain such power.

The symbolism manifest in grass revolts against this very exclusivity. Grass by nature is ubiquitous across all lands and climates and therefore by transposing this universality upon

man seems to indicate two meanings. One that there is no sphere of life where woman is a misfit; left undisturbed to itself it will interiorize the concerned sphere of life just like grass can grow anywhere with a bit of moisture and relative stagnancy. This universality implies that the jouissance inherent in a libidinal economy, to borrow from Helene Cixous, is well capable of trumping and overthrowing the binary logocentrism of masculine privilege which is the deepest trace of the legacy left to the subcontinent by the Victorian evangelical colonizer. The public visibility manifest in the symbol is therefore a repudiation of the discourse of seclusion and concealment.

Moving further from the grass imagery, the poem also displaces the symbol of dew which in traditional Urdu imagery is indicative of the male desire consummated by the female coquettishness. To quote Ghalib:

The delicate dew learns the lesson of death
As the sun kisses it softly
I too shall cease
if you just glance once at me –

Of course, the substitution of dew for tears especially in female eyes is an old cliché in Urdu poetry as it is in English poetry. However the poem resists such a simplified association since it circumvents the image to focus on the essence of the phenomenon – wetness. The image of wetness can be read in terms of sensuousness as an orgasmic phenomenon thus inscribing the sexual as natural with the feminine body – an internalization of '*écriture féminine*'. The association of shame with the expression of the sexual desire especially in case of the feminine is a cornerstone of hetero-patriarchal cultures like Pakistan. The multiplicity or plurality indicated in grass which is always viewed in a plural number is a direct reflection of the intense auto-erotic drive and her diffused abundant sexuality can directly confront the dominant phallic economy with impunity. Luce Irigaray points out in this context that “[woman’s] sexuality always at least double, goes over further: it is plural...woman has more sex organs more or less everywhere. She finds pleasure almost everywhere.”^{vi} Cixous compliments this further when she notes that woman’s writing is accompanied by “A world of searching, the elaboration of knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions.....” Naheed’s symbolization thereof is a conscious internalization of the expressive sexuality of women that is at odds with the logocentric division of visibility set out by historical and cultural ideologues. This ties neatly with the image of “scorching shame” that is associated next with the image of wetness. Rushdie points out in *Shame* that the word shame hardly does justice to the Urdu adjective *sharam*. *Sharam* is a historical phenomenon whose breadth can be hardly captured in the trivial shame. To delineate the import of *sharam* it is necessary to trace its historical emergence and look out for the conditions that permitted its circulation into the social structures of post-colonial theocracy of Islamic Pakistan.

The first major instance of the regulation of the economy of shame is found in the legislation introduced by the late military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq who introduced the Hudood ordinance in 1979 to appease the reactionary Jammāt-e-Islami and other misogynist political structures deriving their authority from books like the translations and interpretations of the Qur’anic verses, the Qur’anic injunctions, and books like “*Bihishti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments) of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwii, that deal with 'perfecting women', and in the guise of Islamic jurisprudence, give a religious sanction to laws that serve to dishonor women.”^{vii} The legislation that set out to circumscribe the limit of punishment – Hudood being the plural of *hadh* (*limit*) for in accordance with Islamic Shari’a law, by enforcing punishments mentioned in the Quran and *sunnah* for “Zina (extramarital sex), Qazf (false accusation of zina), Offence Against Property (theft), and Prohibition (of alcohol consumption). The Zina Ordinance

criminalized zina (adultery and extramarital sex) and required that zina b'il-jabr (rape) be proved through the testimony of four pious men; and the 1982 Law of Evidence equated a woman's testimony to half that of a man"^{viii}.

This circumscribing of the feminine behaviour and resultant censorship is treated in the poem Censorship:

In those times when the camera could not freeze
tyranny for ever
only until those times
should you have written
that history
which describes tyranny as valour.

The passage is integral to the Naheed's poetic discourse since it directly addresses the question of power relations manifest in the gendered hierarchy of a society. I have pointed out earlier that Naheed's poetry is not of interest merely because of her poetic ideology but also on account of its performative value – the structural transgressions are of equal value as the thematic transgressions. The traditional nazm or ghazal generally positions itself to an audience that is implicit in the narration and hence not directly attributed to in the course of narration. Poetry then becomes an overheard conversation – a poet speaking to itself and thereby allowing the world a glimpse of the world crafted by the narration. So you have an Amjad Islam Amjad^{ix} or a Faiz Ahmed Faiz^x – two great proponents of the metered nazm with poems that have audiences implicit in them.

However Naheed rebels against this tradition and clearly marks out the audience or receptor of the verse- a defined audience that bears no identification or ideological sympathy with the poet and thereof is completely closed from observing the feminine world. By clearly marking out the audience the poem defines it more concretely as the tyrant – the agency of tyranny. By naming the audience therefore Naheed is appropriating the power of the masculine to name and label, thus the structure of Zina ordinance is reversed. Rather than a charge brought about by the masculine law which reserves the right to label as it pleases, Naheed's speaker assumes the judicial role and pinpoints the responsibility on the masculine which has projected it all long in history on the feminine. The emphatic presence of an interlocutor speaking in a non-decorated language but in a conversational tone is a powerful reversal of the convention and vests the feminine speaker with a independence and power that is her true and original domain since the style is entirely feminine in nature, tone and structure and not derivational at all but essentially gynocritical.

The charge of tyranny is established clearly at the outset and the rest of the poem proceeds to demolish the flimsy defense of the masculine history. The speaker repudiates the tendency to valorize the hetero-patriarchal traditions like purdah for women of 'shurfaa'^{xi} classes. During this period, women were "neither subjects, nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse" and remained marginal to the debates about their public presence. "All Muslim women were not to be protected, however, and thus the class distinction between the woman as ornament and woman as prostitute was born."^{xii}

Against this nomenclature the speaker rescues the masculinized history and examines its inauthenticity and strips it off its universality. For now there exist valid proofs – photographic as well as written (the pen being a camera metaphorically) that these norms are dictatorial in nature. The feminine expression has comprehensively interrogated the notions of propriety (Lihaaf – Ismat Chughtai) or sexual freedom (Fehmida Riaz: The embrace of tongues – a deeply

sensuous poem illustrating the female pleasure during an act of love making) or the psychological terror of subjugation (Zehra Nigah: *Unlwaful Promises*). Subsequently women can call the bluff and deceit of masculine without being concerned or accused of kizb or lie. For now the celluloid of feminine shared experience no longer permits camouflaging the tendency to use woman as a pawn in attaining social mobility. Going back to the grass poem, Naheed points out the masculine tendency of masculine preventive coercion. The lawn-mower or the repressive apparatus like *purdah* is immediately pressed into action to hegemonize women into an aesthetic decorative symbol and legitimize it in the realm of being a performative act of ensuring social stability. Hanna Papanek points out in this context: “The historiography of 1857 through approximately 1910 focuses on what male prescriptions for female practice and femininity entailed. These prescriptions were originally intended for upper class women with the hopes that lower class women would eventually pick them up. Since *purdah* became performative of class and offered a relatively easy method for upward social mobility, it certainly did trickle down. The model of femininity and class performance, therefore, made a big impact on the status of women on the subcontinent.”^{xiii}

Naheed next turns her attention to the “hysterization of women’s bodies”. The concept follows from the traditional reading of women in Islam as *Naqis-ul-Aqal* (“semi compos mentis” for the Woman) – an instrument of destruction, lust and distraction and therefore to be ensconced in a chador or veil. The speaker posits that the wooden tree can’t now be passed off as a crocodile thereof legitimizing violence in retaliatory defense against it. The transfiguration is important to counter the mythical *la belle dame sans mercy* of old age myths – the witch hunting and associated mythologies. The crocodile is notable for its ferocity, repugnancy and deceit and this follows from the image of coquettish feminine of the ghazal tradition – heartless, cold and oblivious to the tattered senile lover. Such a ferocious being guided solely by instinct, ignorance and faulty judgment can’t be allowed thereof to transgress the limits of the household without being chaperoned by masculine rationality and hence the domestication. Foucault rightly points out that “the feminine body was analyzed- qualified and disqualified – as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality” and placed “in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure.” The tree (woman) stays rooted to the bank of the river (of time) as she enters the various roles of life with aplomb without compromising her identity. Any attempt to feminine (uproot tree from hills) can no longer be hushed up as the pen has been transfigured from a phallic figure to an expressive device and hence the transfer and displacement is complete.

The displacement of masculine rationality as being the safeguard of social piety is effectively demolished in the poem “We sinful Women” which safely passes Eliot’s notion of Tradition. True to the tradition of counter-discursive literature and marginal writing Naheed here internalizes the condition of ‘sin’ in her class and proceeds thereof to demonstrate the virtue inherent in the sin – a paradoxical irony symptomatic of high modernism. The poem bears a strong inter-textual link to Faiz Ahmed Faiz^{xiv} who utilized the same imagery.

The notion of sin and virtue – a binary that has been the refuge of the policing religious class especially in third world countries, is often used to legitimize prohibition or acceptance of a phenomenon. The internalization of sin allows her to question the traditional definition of virtue which in bare rudimentary Marxist terms could be read as the production of productive and reproductive labour without payment as Beauvoir postulates in the *‘The Second Sex’*. A Marxist Analysis of the poem will be enough to suffice for a critical reader and the verbal meaning shall do for the lay reader. I, therefore, will not stress much on this aspect that is manifested in the symbol of ‘harvest’. It is also easy to observe how the poem ends on a confrontational note without resolving the mechanism of repression – defiance being the pervading spirit of the

poem in terms of its strong explicit narratives, without offering an alternative to the fundamentally unjust production and value mechanisms.

I am interested, however, in the aspect of defiance which was traditionally considered to be a masculine bastion and to think of women as defiant or resistant is to equate them with abnormality – a madness for which woman would not desire to be a jewel in the shurfa household. The madness and abnormality springs from the spokespersons of religion who utilize religion to chasten and reform the errant souls – to borrow a phrase from Jane Eyre. The refusal of women to submit against the lie of masochistic subordination and mental censure in hope of religious salvation (for the reading portrays disobedience of female as equivalent to refusing a guardian and hence punishable in the severest terms) is a cry against the “religious mania” that underlines laws like the Hudood ordinance. Subsequently the moral insanity (sin is considered to be a major cause of insanity deriving from the Victorian fear of syphilis) that refuses to be what is fundamentally insane and induced docility is a natural insanity which should be accepted and brandished with pride. The insanity and shame of insanity thereof are transfigured into badges of honour because they are the paradigms of rationality on which the masculine world prides itself. The insanity of immorality (for no ‘sane’ woman will taint her honour which is her dearest and costliest jewel). This ‘punishment’ of ostracizing these women by inflicting violence upon them (cutting of tongues which should be taken literally as well as symbolically) is acceptable then to remaining immune to it by accepting the greater punishment of being docile and relegated to unproductive realms. The influx of better or pleasure by extension thereof becomes a case of inversion where the punishment is naturally to be seen as a sign of masculine anxiety rather than female subordination. This in turn entails the erasure of the dominance of the phallogocentric economy for in the logocentric binary punishment is equated with bareness – negative conditioning or a training to forego of producing a said act. But in here the feminine is fertile as the harvest is not only produced by saved for utilization by the producer.

The fractured consciousness, which till now was threatened by virtue to remain in a constant state of subordination, order and superficial aesthetics shall now erupt like grass – shall regenerate and renew itself even after the lawn mower has turned itself blunt by the repeated friction, as it is desensitized by an awareness of its libidinal economy. Foucault’s concept of the order discourse is particularly useful here to understand how Naheed places her poetry firmly within the feminist space. Robert Young illustrates the Foucauldian discourse as “a discrete realm of discursive practice – a conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and produced: As he elaborates “what is analyzed is not simply what was thought or said per se, but all discursive rules and categories that were apriori, assumed as a constituent part of discourse and therefore of knowledge, and so fundamental that they remained unvoiced and unthought...Their effect is to make it virtually impossible to think outside them is, by definition to be mad, to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason. It is in this way that we can see how discursive rules are linked to the exercise of power, how the forms of discourse are both constituted by and ensure the reproduction of the social system through forms of selection, exclusion and domination.”

Conclusion: It is easy to see in this light then why Naheed demands punishment and accepts it in the poem “Talking to Myself” daring the repressive hetero –patriarchy to:

Punish me for I have imparted knowledge and the skills of the sword to the murderer and demonstrated the power of the pen to the mind
Punish me for I have been the challenger of the crucifix of hatred
I’m the glow of torches which burn against the wind
Punish me for I have freed womanhood from the insanity of the deluded night

Punish me for if I live you might lose face.

Masculinity pitted against a shameless woman and then going to the extent of punishing her!
The response of *shurfa* would be: *Miyaa! Sharam tum ko magar nahee aati (Sir! Still you don't feel ashamed?)*

References

- i : Huma Yousuf: The Geopolitics Of Soap Operas: International Herald Tribune : 13th January 2013
- ii Bessel A. van der Kolk, Susan Roth, David Pelcovitz, Susanne Sunday, and Joseph Spinazzola (2005). "Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of a Complex Adaptation to Trauma". Journal of Traumatic Stress
- iii Source: Surprise! Pretty people earn more- CNN Money April 2005.
- iv Laila Majnoon: 1979
- v Wet eyes and a crazed will are not enough;
Nor are accusations of a furtive love;
Stride in the bazaar today, shackles on your feet. – Faiz Ahmed faiz (Aaj Bazaar main) trans Agha Shahid Ali.
- vi Luce Inigray: Speculum of the other Woman, trans. Gillian C Gill (Cornell University Press 1985)
- vii Dr. Arshad Masood Hashmi: The impure woman: Marginality and detachment in Kishwar Naheed's poetry: Journal View Point Issue 166
- viii Women of Pakistan: Two steps forward, one step back? : Mumtaz Khawar and Farida Shaheed: Zed Books 1987
- ix In the name of my land-
A vase expanse
Of pale dead leaves
Whose voices were torn
By the lightening
That flashed across those dark skies.
The land that guards
Its ailments with a religious zeal-
The ailments that are the souvenirs
Of the phantoms
Who once lived there. (Intisaab: Faiz Ahmed Faiz: trans(me))
- x In a solitary corner in the carnival existence
There is a deserted pavilion
That depicts the unfathomable
Torrent of desire.
Ask no questions of me
One can hardly
Reflect and answer
In this melee.
Time passes me by-
Like the dark shadow
Carved on cracked walls
By the all too brief afternoon sun.
Fate treats me

Like the old starved ragged beggar
Denied the left overs
From an opulent feast Zindagi kay melay main: Amjad Islam Amjad Trans (me)

^{xi} Shurfaa: plural of shareef: noble, characterized, esteemed.

^{xii} Ayesha Jalal: Self and Sovereignty

^{xiii} Hanna Papanek “Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter,” published in Comparative Studies in Society and History (1973)

^{xiv} Witness the vacant pulpit, the prayer rug too is empty –

yet no one dares raise his head –

such is the dread of the tunic

the sway of the turban, My Love do see-

Bibliography:

1. Habib MAR: An Anthology of Modern Urdu Poetry MLA 2003
2. Lodge David: Modern Criticism and Theory
3. Akhter Madihah Falak: Fictionalizing a Feminist Self: Kishwar Naheed’s Buri Aurat ki Katha: Tufts University (MA dissertation)
4. Gendering Madness: Female Insanity in Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre: Medonica Brian: 1992: Pune University (Mphil Dissertation).
5. Women’s Studies Quarterly Vol 39 fall/winter 2011: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York