

Another Woman – Imtiaz Dharker (A Detailed Analysis)

Basic themes on which the poem revolves around

- Wife/Daughter-in-Law = Servant
- DOWRY
- Importance/Significance of the Male compared to the Female
- Could relate to any 'Indian' Woman (rural areas of the Indian Subcontinent)
- Domestic Violence

The Poet – in a Nutshell

- Born on 1954, Lahore, Pakistan
- Moved to Glasgow with her parents when she was less than a year old
- 5 books of poetry, all self illustrated
- Purdah (1989)
- Postcards from God (1997) – including Purdah
- I Speak for the Devil (2001)
- Terrorists at My Table (2006)
- Leaving Fingerprints (2009)
- Over the Moon (2014)
- Seen as one of the most inspirational contemporary poets of Britain
- Awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry

The Poem – A detailed Summary:

The poem starts off with the Protagonist buying her usual grocery for her family. She buys 'methi', choosing the freshest bunch available. After that, she picks up a radish, imagining the sweet and sharp sensations that it would create in her mouth when she would eat it. But then again, she steps back into reality and keeps the radish aside because the money she has, it is not her money. It is considered as her 'husband's family's money' and she would not be allowed to spend it the way she liked. There could be no extravagant spending on her part. So, after carefully counting her coins and tying them in a bundle into her sari, she left for home.

When she reaches home, the first thing she faces is her Mother-in-Law's dark looks. Looks that contained not just anger but hatred of the deepest kind. Without any response, the Protagonist goes on with her work. She cut the 'methi' that she had bought and chopped them, turning her hands yellow in the process due to the juice. She finely cut an onion and cooked the whole thing in a pot with salt and cumin seeds on the stove, shielding her face from the heat.

In the first paragraph we find that the lady, although she is the wife/Daughter-in-Law, she has to live life there with a very servile attitude. Maybe even servants were treated better than she was. At least they would not have to face the dark looks from their masters when they return after buying groceries for their masters. The lady's life in her husband's house has no value. She is

treated as an object that cleans, cooks, does all the household chores and also as an object on which the other family members can take out their frustration on.

The Mother-in-Law comes in again and piles up her usual scolding on the Protagonist. She scolds her for spending the money and for countless other reasons which she is not even responsible for. She curses the lady's parents for giving birth to her and more so for marrying this lady to her son. She feels the Protagonist is a bad omen and due to her presence, the home is darkened.

In the second paragraph, we find the Mother-in-Law scolding and cursing the Protagonist. The main and the only reason behind this is because the Protagonist's father/family has not been able to pay the required amount of Dowry.

As usual, she crouches on the floor and continues with her work. Her husband comes home and she does not even have the usual liberty of a normal wife to talk to her husband about their day and their problems. The unpaid Dowry stole her every single liberty, even vocal liberties.

The third paragraph shows us that the unpaid dowry has caused a failure not just in the lady's in-laws' family but also in her marriage, the relationship that only she and her husband shared. She cannot even look him in the eye, forget about talking to him. Their marriage is not even like a marriage. It is more like a failed business deal.

She now helplessly watches the flame glow and touch the cheap old pot, "a wing of brightness against its blackened cheek".

She thinks about her life. About the man with whom she was forced to marry, the house she was forcefully sent to and the future that awaited her, that is, the life which she had to spend there.

Paragraph four and five is all about the lady's thoughts and her contemplation about her own life. As she watches the flame rise up and touches the cheap old pot, she even contemplates this very view. The fire gives a kind of brightness to the pot when it touches the pot and yet, it is the same fire which in the long run blackens the 'cheek' of the pot. She can totally relate this view to her life as marriage being the fire and her life being the pot. The marriage gives her the status of a respectable woman in the society but it is the same marriage which is the reason for most of the unhappy things in her life.

After much pain and contemplation, she threw the kerosene on herself. For her, it was the only escape. It was the only choice she ever had.

The last paragraph depicts the helplessness of the protagonist. For her, death is the only relief from this lifelong journey of pain and torture. This was the only way she could get peace and she went for it, losing her life in the bargain

The last three lines are the strongest lines in the poem. It depicts that she immolates herself in search for peace and escape from torture.

“Another torch, blazing in the dark

Another woman

We shield our faces from the heat”

Those three lines are like a separate Nanotale by itself. It talks about ‘another’ woman setting herself on fire, giving light in the dark.

‘Another’ depicts that it is a very common thing in the land. This incident could take place with any woman because the treatment is almost the same.

The last line shows the failure, the failure of her family, her in-Laws’ family, her husband and also the society, her family’s failure by not looking for good husband and household for her daughter and also for not paying the Dowry. Her in-Laws’ failed by treating her as an object and torturing her throughout. Her husband failed by not giving her the status, respect and treatment that a wife deserves and lastly, the society’s failure. Even after knowing everything, they just keep quiet and do not seem to bother about it, just like “shielding the faces from the heat”

Afterthoughts:

The title of the poem is very aptly chosen as it is a very prevalent and common thing, at least in the rural areas of the Indian Subcontinent, where these customs are followed. Mrs. Dharker, being a British citizen, has written a very effective and factual poem on the customs prevalent in her land of birth and the nations around it. The title, in my opinion, is the most effective one because this treatment and this incident can happen to any woman. Any other woman. Maybe not in the western countries but here, the Indian Subcontinent, especially rural areas, any married woman can/could relate to this poem.

This poem is like the song which plays in every married woman’s head but she is scared to sing it out, due to the fear that it might just become a reality for her and in that way her very life would be at stake.

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