

LISTEN TO ME

KISHWAR NAHEED



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- **Kishwar Naheed** -born 1940) is a feminist Urdu poet from Pakistan.
- She has written several poetry books.
- She has also received awards including Sitara-e-Imtiaz for her literary contribution towards Urdu literature.

Life

- Naheed was born in India.
- She migrated to Lahore, Pakistan after partition in 1949 with her family.
- She struggled and fought to receive education when women were not allowed to go to school.
- She studied at home and received a high school diploma through correspondence courses.
- In Pakistan she went on to obtain Master of Arts degree in Economics from Punjab University, Lahore
- Kishwar married a poet Yousuf Kamran and the couple have two sons.
- After her husband's death, she worked to raise her children and support the family.

Career

- Naheed has served major positions in various national institutions, as director general of Pakistan National Council of the Arts.
- She also worked and edited a literary magazine *Mahe naw*.
- She established *Hawwa* organisation (Eve).
- The purpose of the organisation is to support those women who have not independent income, providing financially opportunities through cottage industries and selling handicrafts.

Literary works

- Kishwar has written six collections of poems between 1969 and 1990.
- Her first poetry collection *Lab-i goya* was published in 1968, that won the Adamjee Prize of Literature.
- She also writes for children and for the daily Jang.
- Her several poems have been translated into English and Spanish.

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- The poem articulates Kishwar Naheed's intense desire for freedom, desire to be heard and an even more intense fear of punishment.
- In the poem the poet Kishwar Naheed uses very ordinary activities of life as symbols.
- In the hands of Naheed, commonplace activities like speaking, breathing, walking, laughing, thinking, crying and forgetting become powerful symbols.

- In a country like Pakistan where her fundamental right to expression is severely curbed, the woman writer in Kishwar Naheed chokes.
- She desperately tries to articulate her intense desire for freedom and self-expression through these powerful symbols.
- For instance, if one wants to speak, the punishment is death. In another vivid expression, she says that if one wants to walk, one must cut off the legs and carry them in the arms.
- In yet another poignant symbol, she suggests that if one wants to cry, one must sink into the river.

Feminist poem

- The poem can be seen as a powerful feminist poem.
- In a country like Pakistan where her fundamental right to expression is severely curbed, the woman writer in Kishwar Naheed chokes.
- She feels that she must speak out in the open if the fate of the womenfolk in Pakistan is to improve.
- Currently, the situation in the country is horrible.
- No woman writer in Pakistan can feel safe about expressing herself.

- In the poem she says that if a woman wants to speak, the punishment is death.
- In yet another poignant symbol, she suggests that if a woman wants to cry, she must sink into the river.
- Even in her thought processes, her freedom is severely curbed. If she must think, she should shut all the doors and throw away the key.

Rhetorical effects of “If”

- The poem “Listen to Me” by Kishwar Naheed achieves its strong rhetorical effect through the use of ‘if’.
- In fact, the entire poem can be seen as a series of ‘ifs’. The poem presents eight ‘ifs’, each of which is a powerful symbol.
- She desperately tries to articulate her intense desire for freedom and self-expression through these powerful symbols.
- For instance, if one wants to speak, the punishment is death. In another vivid expression, she says that if one wants to walk, one must cut off the legs and carry them in the arms.
- In yet another poignant symbol, she suggests that if one wants to cry, one must sink into the river.
- Even in her thought processes, her freedom is severely curbed. If she must think, she should shut all the doors and throw away the key.
- If one wants to laugh, one must hang upside down in a well.

Irony in the poem

- There is a distinct element of irony towards the fag end of the poem. The entire poem can be seen as a series of 'ifs.
- The increase in the intensity of agony is spelt out in the pattern of images that become increasingly stark and poignant.
- However, the last statement in the poem says, "If you want to forget everything, then pause and think: of the word you first learnt".
- The poet catches us off guard here. The poem achieves its ironic effect by deceiving the unwary reader