

KISHWAR NAHEED

- Born in 1940, in Bulandshahr, U.P., British India.
- Post partition, she migrated to Lahore, Pakistan. Nationality: Pakistani
- BA, MA in Economics from Punjab University, Lahore.
- Was Director General of the Pakistan National Council of Arts
- Married poet Yousuf Kamran and had two sons.
- Founded an organization named 'Hawwa' to help women become independent through cottage industries
- Ghazal writer
- 12 volumes of poetry: 'We Sinful Women'
- 8 books for children and won UNESCO award for children's literature

THE GRASS IS REALLY LIKE ME

Tr. Rukhsana Ahmed

The grass is also like me
it has to unfurl underfoot to fulfil itself
but what does its wetness manifest:
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 lawnmower
obsessed with flattening it into velvet,
mows it down again.
How you strive and endeavour
to level woman down too!
But neither the earth's nor woman's
desire to manifest life dies.
Take my advice: the idea of making a footpath was a good one.

Those who cannot bear the scorching defeat of their courage

are grafted on to the earth.
That's how they make way for the mighty
but they are merely straw not grass
—the grass is really like me.

Unfurl: open out or spread out

Wetness: moisture/dampness

Manifest: show/reveal

Scorching: very hot

Strive: labor/work

Endeavour: work hard/struggle/toil

Poetic devices

1. Simile: "The grass is really *like* me"
2. Personification: "As soon as it can raise its head"
3. Metaphor: "They are merely straw not grass"

Key Themes

Kishwar Naheed's poem is a profound commentary on **female oppression and resilience**, drawing parallels between women and grass to emphasize their quiet but powerful defiance.

1. Oppression of Women in Patriarchal Societies:

The poem depicts how **patriarchal systems** seek to control, flatten, and suppress women, much like a lawnmower cuts down grass to maintain uniformity. The **lawnmower** symbolizes society's effort to restrict women, ensuring they conform to a submissive and voiceless existence.

- **Lines Highlighting This Theme:**

- *"As soon as it can raise its head, the lawnmower... mows it down again."*
- *"How you strive and endeavour to level woman down too!"*

Society desires conformity, and any attempt by women to assert themselves is almost always met with suppression. The metaphor of flattening grass into velvet highlights how women are expected to be **docile and pleasing**, stripped of their individuality. This constant suppression reflects the generational oppression that women endure.

2. Resilience and Regeneration of Women:

Despite oppression, women, like grass, possess the strength to rise again. Grass regrows even after being trampled or cut down, symbolizing women's inherent resilience and capacity for **rebirth and renewal**.

- **Lines Highlighting This Theme:**

- *"It has to unfurl underfoot to fulfill itself."*
- *"Neither the earth's nor woman's desire to manifest life dies."*

Even when their voices are silenced, their identities suppressed, and their ambitions cut down, women continue to find ways to **grow back**. Their inner strength and unyielding spirit enable them to reclaim their space, much like grass that cannot be permanently subdued.

3. Emotional and Psychological Pain of Suppression:

The poem captures the emotional pain and turmoil experienced by women living under constant oppression. The **wetness of the grass** is symbolic of either **tears of shame or intense emotion**, reflecting the emotional cost of enduring a life where desires and voices are crushed.

- **Lines Highlighting This Theme:**

- *"But what does its wetness manifest: a scorching sense of shame or the heat of emotion?"*

Women's tears, symbolic of their suffering and struggles, are not wasted. Instead, these tears fuel their growth and resilience. The **"heat of emotion"** suggests a simmering strength and passion beneath the surface, ready to break free.

4. Submission vs. Resistance:

Naheed contrasts the **passivity of those who surrender** to oppression with the resilience of those who resist. Those who lose their courage and submit become **straw**—lifeless and passive—while those who persist remain **grass**—alive, resilient, and capable of rebirth.

- **Lines Highlighting This Theme:**

- *"Those who cannot bear the scorching defeat of their courage are grafted on to the earth."*
- *"But they are merely straw, not grass."*

The poet suggests that giving in to oppression results in losing one's essence and identity. **Straw** symbolizes lifeless conformity, while **grass** represents

continued resistance and renewal. This highlights the importance of standing firm and refusing to be silenced.

5. Critique of Societal Norms and Gender Roles:

The **footpath** is a metaphor for the pre-defined paths that society has created for women, limiting their choices and independence. The idea of **making a footpath** implies that society has devised ways to keep women confined to specific roles, ensuring their continued subjugation.

- **Lines Highlighting This Theme:**

- *"Take my advice: the idea of making a footpath was a good one."*

Society creates structures that make it easier to **control and suppress women** without overt violence. The footpath ensures that grass stays flattened, just as societal norms ensure that women remain confined within patriarchal boundaries.

6. Feminist Resistance and Empowerment:

The poem embodies a **feminist call to resistance**, encouraging women to recognize their strength and continue pushing against societal oppression. Naheed's metaphor of grass suggests that even the smallest acts of resistance can lead to larger movements for change.

- **Lines Highlighting This Theme:**

- *"The grass is really like me."*
- *"It lifts its head a little higher."*

Grass's quiet defiance in regrowing, despite being cut down, becomes a powerful symbol of **feminist resistance**. The poet subtly encourages women to keep resisting, asserting that their courage and resilience will ultimately lead to their liberation.

- **Meaning of the poem**

Kishwar Naheed's poem, 'The Grass Is Really Like Me' presents a compelling exploration of women's strength and the adversities they encounter within a society that often seeks to control them. The poet uses the image of grass to illustrate this struggle. Grass, a living entity that strives for growth, is repeatedly subjected to the "lawnmower," a symbolic representation of the societal forces that limit women's autonomy. Therefore, the repetitive act of

cutting down the grass mirrors the repeated attempts to suppress women's voices and freedoms.

The image of wet grass conveys the hidden pain and emotional suffering women experience when they must conceal their true selves. Societal pressures often necessitate the suppression of their desires and authentic expression. However, despite these efforts to diminish them, women, much like the grass, exhibit a remarkable capacity for resilience. The act of regrowing, even after being cut down, signifies their determination to live and express themselves freely.

The poem also critiques the restrictive societal norms that attempt to confine women to specific roles. The "footpath" symbolizes these imposed boundaries, representing the limitations placed on women's potential. A distinction is drawn between those who succumb to these pressures, becoming like lifeless straw, and those who resist, continuing to grow and thrive like vibrant grass.

Ultimately, the poem affirms the inherent and indestructible strength possessed by women. Regardless of the frequency with which they are subjected to subjugation, women, akin to the persistent regrowth of grass, consistently reclaim their space. This serves as a testament to their unwavering spirit and their refusal to be silenced or controlled. The poem celebrates the enduring ability of women to overcome obstacles and assert their presence in the world.