

Another Woman

This morning she bought green 'methi'
in the market, choosing the freshest bunch;
picked up a white radish,
imagined the crunch it would make
between her teeth, the sweet sharp taste,
then put it aside, thinking it
an extravagance, counted her coins
out carefully, tied them, a small bundle
into her sari at the waist;
came home, faced her mother-in-law's
dark looks, took
the leaves and chopped them,
her hands stained yellow from the juice;
cut an onion, fine and cooked
the whole thing in the pot
over the stove,
shielding her face from the heat.

The usual words came and beat
their wings against her: the money spent,
curses heaped upon her parents,
who had sent her out
to darken other people's doors.

She crouched, as usual, on the floor
beside the stove,

When the man came home
she did not look into his face
nor raise her head; but bent
her back a little more.
Nothing gave her the right
to speak.



She watched the flame hiss up
and beat against the cheap old pot,
a wing of brightness
against its blackened cheek.

This was the house she had been sent to,
the man she had been bound to,
the future she had been born into.

So when the kerosene was thrown
(just a moment of surprise,
A brilliant spark)
It was the only choice
that she had ever known.

Another torch, blazing in the dark.

Another woman.

We shield our faces from the heat.

Glossary

- methi (*n*) : fenugreek
white radish (*n*) : white and round or finger-shaped vegetable
extravagance (*n*) : spending more than necessary in an uncontrolled way

Comprehension

I. Answer the following questions.

1. The woman thought of buying a white radish but later on decided against it thinking it an extravagance. Do you think it is an extravagance? Support your answer.
2. What does the phrase 'mother-in-law's dark looks' suggest?
3. "The usual words came and beat..." (line 19). Where did the words come from? Why?

4. Why did the woman crouch on the floor? (line 24)
5. Why do you think the woman bent her back a little more when her husband came home? Was her husband helpful? Support your answer quoting from the poem.
6. What does the phrase 'as usual' suggest?
7. The last line of the first stanza talks about the woman shielding her face from heat whereas the last line of the poem talks about people shielding their face from the heat. How are they different?
8. "So when the kerosene was thrown..." Who threw the kerosene? Why? Support your answer quoting from the poem.
9. What does the title suggest?
10. Words do not have wings, but the author used them as if they had wings (...the usual words came and beat their wings against...). This is a literary device called personification. Find out the other instances of personification in the poem.
11. In the story 'The Journey', the author used the journey as a symbol of life. You will find such symbols in this poem too. Pick them out and talk about them.
12. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, 'Another woman' highlighting the social issue it deals with.



About the author

Ms. Intiaz Dharker was born in Lahore in Pakistan in 1954 and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland. She is ranked on par with some of the famous women poets of India such as Kamala Das, Sujatha Bhatt and Tara Patel. She is not only a poet but also a painter and an accomplished documentary film maker. Her collections of poetry include *Purdah*, *Postcards from God*, and *I Speak for the Devil*, *The Terrorist at My Table* and *Leaving Fingerprints*.