We Sinful Women

Kishwar Naheed*

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Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940) is one of Pakistan’s leading poets, a feminist, and activist in the women’s movement. Below is her well-known poem, translated from the original in Urdu.

It is we sinful women
who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns

who don’t sell our lives
who don’t bow our heads
who don’t fold our hands together.

It is we sinful women
while those who sell the harvests of our bodies
become exalted
become distinguished
become the just princes of the material world.

It is we sinful women
who come out raising the banner of truth
up against barricades of lies on the highways
who find stories of persecution piled on each threshold
who find that tongues which could speak have been severed.
It is we sinful women.
Now, even if the night gives chase
these eyes shall not be put out.
For the wall which has been razed
don’t insist now on raising it again.

It is we sinful women
who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns

who don’t sell our bodies
who don’t bow our heads
who don’t fold our hands together.

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