

Optimism and Pessimism in Purdah I and Pardah Nashin by Imtiaz Dharker and Sarojini Naidu

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Abstract:

There is a mild issue broke out in a college premises of Karnataka, a metropolitan state of India and which flares up throughout the India and the world. Before Pardah issue, most of the muslims in north India were lynched by fanatics and hooligans in the name of religious blasphemy such as cow meat eaters, love Jihad, land jihad and etc. Pardah is a sort of attire which is worn by many of the muslim women to protect themselves from the abysmal thoughts of men in the polluted society. Moreover, it is rights of the muslim women and no one can denied it. Fascists advertently spread Pardah issue because they failed to brainwash the secularist mind with the hindutva agenda of polarizing the Indians as Hindu and Muslims. They also use various aforesaid issues to create troubles against muslim minorities but it vanished by the hands of people who like the integration of our country. This type of hate policy spreads among the citizens of India which may lead the muslims as marginalized.

Keywords: Pardah Issue, Jihad, Minorities, Secularism, Marginalized

Imtiaz Dharker has emerged as one of the important poets who has challenged the conventions of patriarchy as part of their strategies to grasp the male society. She was assured to oppose her community's traditional nature in indisputable terms. Her two poems, "Purdah I" and "Purdah II" are invariably treated as her poetic manifestation of rebellion against conservative patriarchal Muslim society. The title of the poem "Purdah" is very literally significant. It denotes veil or cover but carries a connotation that Purdah is a typical patriarchal machination that confines the women within the false sense of security and respectability. Dharker raises the symbol of revolt against the conventional Islamic culture and its traditions and customs, attempts to crush the subalterns at every phase of their life. The veil or 'Purdah' is used in the Islamic religion to cover the body which is nothing but stress that women are fragile and dependent. Therefore they are required to be safeguarded and protected from the conspicuous evil eyes of men.

She describes the process that a woman's freedom is curtailed and restricted. A Muslim girl's desire for freedom and independence and her helplessness to break the chains of boundaries of religion, customs and patriarchal supremacy are prominently present in her unparliamentary words in two poems of Purdah. These two poems of Imtiaz Dharker revealed deeply conscious identity of a double marginalized personality, a muslim and a woman. Dharker proclaims that women's social discrimination and religious restrictions have denied them all their possibilities and opportunities, making them psychologically oppressed and suppressed.

The first poem "Purdah I" focuses on a significant period in the life of a girl growing into the youth in a Muslim community. At a young age, her physical beauty attracts men's attention and that is not good in a conventional society. Therefore she must maintain the decency and decorum of a young lady and she echoes:

"One day they said
She was old enough to learn some shame
She found it came quite naturally" (Purdah 14).

Purdah becomes the symbol of repression, subjugation, subordination and oppression of women. It bases unashamed violation of their basic rights, freedom, dignity, and the individuality of women. However in Muslim society, it is obligatory for women to cover the head to foot in the veil. Purdah's custom dehumanizes women. The following lines she reveals effectively:

Purdah is a kind of safety
The body finds a place to hide.
The cloth fans out against the skin
much like the earth that falls
on coffins after they put the dead men in. (P. 14)

In the Muslim community, women feel themselves mechanically handled as puppets in the hands of men and their actions are only determined by the wishes of the male members. Some men look at women only as sexual objects and they exploited physically, psychologically and emotionally. The poem "Purdah II" critiques the rites and rituals customary in Islam ruthlessly. Dharker points out to the shame conventions and practices of Islam which brings about certain annoyances on women. According to Dharker, a girl child's fate in a conservative Muslim society is conserved from the very birth to death. The under privileged Muslim women are nurtured as not to raise their voice against any oppression. They lose their vocal power and then gradually silenced in the darkness. "Purdah I and II" sets off the Muslim women to remove the barriers of the traditions that obstruct their lives and feel their individuality rejecting the male inherent conventions. Imtiaz Dharker considers Purdah not only a concealing garment but a state of mind which works as suppression and standstill to the intellectual awakening and growth of women.

Purdah I and Purdah II comes out as a revolt against Purdah which has socio-cultural and social religious associations mainly for Muslim women and also for some Hindu women in

the northern part of India. Dharker regards Purdah system making women feel alienated from their true self. Imtiaz Dharker regards purdah not just as a masking garment but as slate of mind which works as suppression and deadlock to the intellectual awakening and growth of women. In words of A.K Tiwari, "The purdah is an instrument of masculine effort to keep low the spirit of intendance in women. The conformance to the norms of purdah restricts and limits the role of women, keeping them within the confines of the Jenana apartments and keeps their status low." Purdah nothing more than woman's prison house, makes her a puppet in the hands of social power mongers, makes her devoid of choices and works as a terrible weapon for her seclusion from society.

Muslim families start training their girl children of five to nine years to wear purdah with the conviction that it protects her from the penetrating gaze of public eyes. At an age group of twelve to fifteen, they are forced into a rigorous kind of seclusion from men folk. At the same time a girl is made conscious of her sexual growth as perhaps others are more conscious about it. Dharker calls this seclusion as a kind of "the interior colonization" which reduces the woman to a walking corpse. However purdah is viewed as an obvious violation of the basic rights, freedom of muslim women. Purdah is treated as symbol of suppression on women as it is devastatingly ruinous to the personality of women. To be covered from head to foot in the black veil is more obligatory to Muslim women. There has been an irregular revolt and heated controversy in the print and electronic media against this practice to regenerate and rejuvenate the term "Purdah or Pardaa" has its origin in Persian language which means "curtain". Veil becomes a refuge for women where they feel safe from harm and disapproval. However it is also a symbol of oppression, a sign of alienation from one's own self, as a girl is forced to do what is expected of her rather than what she feels.

However, many women imagine veiling as an act of empowerment. They feel that veil isn't a loss of individual identity rather it is the gain of one homogenous conscious identity which all the women share. This brings out the feeling of solidarity and sisterhood. Also, many women wearing veil is a representation of their honour, femininity, supremacy, and sometimes comfort. The poem 'Purdah' appeared in Dharker's first collection of poetry. The purdah also stands as a metaphor for the way women seek refuge and retreat into shells to be safe from harm and disapproval. The purdah also stands as an alienation from one's own self. The social pressure and stress makes one lose a sense of being true to oneself. Women, from a very early age, are taught about their gender and the shame associated with it and Dharker's views relates from these early teachings. In the beginning, the girl who uses the purdah considers it as something distinct or separate from her but slowly she becomes accustomed to it and it comes to be associated with her perception of herself and the outside world.

'The Pardah Nashin' is a fine lyric from the last section of The Golden Threshold. Pardah Nashin means a lady who lives or sits behind the glorification of purdah. But it stresses one essential aspect of Muslim culture or the Indian way of life as a whole. When the lyric was penned and purdah still lingers on in conventional Muslim families. The purdah nashin lives a life of ease and comfort security in the harams of the rich. She persistently moves in a world of

dreams. She has nothing much to do, she is well sheltered from the burdens of life. Her life is a perpetual ease and relaxation. She is bejeweled with diamond-studded girdles around her waist and bright gems in her hair which shines like changing fires on sunset seas. The scintillating brightness of her jewelry puzzles the eyes. Her dress also is soft like the morning mist embroidered with opal and gold.

She lives a life of ease and comfort well protected from the lustful looks which the wicked stealthily cast on a woman. She lives a sheltered and secure life behind the well decorated windows of her room. She is hidden from the world's eyes as jewels in the casket. She is as unknown to the outside world as "secrets in a lover's breast. The purdah nashin leads a sheltered life beyond the reach of the wicked and the impure. None can dare unveil her hidden graces without permission none can look at her hidden graces without permission; none can look at her beauty without first obtaining her sanction or that of her guardians. But all her purdah and all the security she enjoys are fruitless; they cannot halt the march of time. Even the sheltered and secure Purdah Nashin knows sorrow and suffering with time, leaving their traces on her face. No purdah and no security can prevent the stealthy march of time, which robs her of her happiness and fills her eyes with tears.

They are sheltered from all abusive and unwanted attention though actively engaged in the campaign for women's freedom. They had a liking for the purdah. It was a world of courtesy and charm in which women of delicate beauty with peroxide tinted hands and gem entangled tresses reclined lazily on silken cushions. This world enchanted her like the alabaster box of which she wrote. The Pardah Nashin lives a life of ease, comfort, and security in the peculiar place house. She constantly moves in a world of dreams. The world she lives in is far removed from the real world's reality, which is full of turmoil and tension, problems, and worries. She has nothing much to do. She is well sheltered from the burden of life. Her life is a life of perpetual ease and relaxation. She is bejeweled with diamond-studded girdles around her waist and bright gems in her hair shine. This marvelous image brings home to the readers the scintillating brightness of her jewelry. Her dress also is soft like the morning mist embroidered with opal, gold, and lilac.

Sarojini Naidu describes the life lived by the Pardah Nashin in the inner sanctuary of the palatial house of some rich man. No lecherous man can ravage her innocence and nor can the elements of nature harm her physical self. She lives a sheltered and secure life behind the well decorated windows of her room. She is hidden from the world's eyes as jewels in the hair are obscured by a turban. She is as unknown to the outside world and hidden away from the outside world as secrets are kept hidden in a lover's heart.

The poetess speaks of the appropriated and secluded life of the Pardah nashin. The Pardah nashin leads a sheltered life beyond the reach of the wicked and the impure. None can dare unveil her hidden graces without permission. None can look at her beauty without first obtaining her sanction or that of her guardians. But all her purdah and all the security she

enjoys are futile and they cannot halt the march of time. With time even the sheltered and secure Purdah nashin knows sorrow and suffering which leave their traces on her face. No Purdah and no security can prevent the stealthy march of time which robs her of her happiness and trappings her eyes with tears.

The poem 'Purdah Nashin' was written by Sarojini Naidu. She wrote this poem for the Muslim ladies who always cover their faces with veil. She comments on their way of living. She doesn't want to hurt their religion. As she always supports Muslim league and respects their religion and tradition. She was a little upset about the fact that the Muslim women have to cover their faces every time. She praised the honest thought of their religion of protecting their women by the meant of veil cover their face which will not allowed other men to see their faces. They might believe that there women are secure in that way. There is no air their women can breathe freely and there is always the net which comes before them. They might be protected and they might be decorated by the shiny and glittering jewelries to make them a complete lady but their soul cannot shine like them. Their life they are brought up by the men their father and brother and when they grow up and got married the other men of the house. His husband will take over their father and brother place. They are always in the hands of men. They are always under the male supremacy. Their beauty and talent are always concealed just like the purdah. The poem is about the freedom of soul of Muslim women. She wants to encourage the Muslim women talent and for their freedom of their individuality which lost in the Purdah Nashin.

The maiden under the dark blackly veil is almost secure and free from the thieving light of the impure eyes that may not see her with lustful looks her beauty and youth to follow her or hold in admiration to die for her as love lies it forbidden here. The cover also guards her form the coveting sun or the wind's stroke as these do in the desert lands of Arabia saving from heat and dust and desert storms and whirling sands. The covering keeps her fragile as well hiding from sun and dust. She is guarded well and secure behind the purdah. She is just like a jewel of the turbaned crest, a secret of some lover's breast. She too has a body and a soul. She is not merely a slave. She also wants to fly like a bird as she is after all a woman.

A thing of beauty definitely it glistens. Her youth and beauty are doomed to be withered and shriveled. Though none can lift her veil, instead of that it will slip through the passage of time one day when sorrow will peep into the eyes of hers to find she is also after all a woman and her breast filled with the milk of human kindness but she cannot forsake it.

She deals with the life of a woman behind the curtain. Sarojini says the Muslim ladies are safe in their purdah but at the mean time their feelings are filtered inside the purdah. This poem shows the Indian Muslim ladies' life which is completely dominated by men. In the first stanza Sarojini visualizes the positive aspects of wearing purdah. She says the Muslim ladies feel comfort and easy in purdah. Even though they are in costly dress and costly Jewells which are used to decorate themselves and to look beautiful and sensuous they are veiled and waiting for their masters. It shows the blissful state of Muslim women. This poem has the beautiful

description on purdah. It is compared to “Changing fires on sunset seas;” (PN). The veil has beauty in itself and glamour of its own. Through this “Her days are guarded and secure” (PN) and it protects them “From converting sun and wind’s cares”. In purdah the Muslim ladies are as jewels in a turbaned crest but they are like secrets hidden in a lovers’ heart. Purdah is traditional concept of Muslim community. The ladies wear it for various reasons. Simultaneously Sarojini shows the tears of these ladies.

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.” (Quran 33:59). According to Quran and Prophet’s sayings, hijab or pardah is not a designed dress for muslim women. The concept of Islam about women is to cover their parts which magnetize to men. This verses of Quran instructs all the women to cover their particular parts which induce men to do something mischief to women or make them for sexual harassment.

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their *khimār* over their breasts and not display their beauty except to their husband, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments.(*Quran 24:30*)

Muhammad asks his family members and other Muslim women to wear outer garments when they go out, so that they are not harassed. (Quran 33:59)

O Prophet! Enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient, that they may be distinguished and not be harassed. (*Quran 33:59*). Believers, enter not the houses of the Prophet without his permission, nor wait for a meal to be prepared; instead enter when you are invited to eat, and when you have had the meal, disperse. (33:53)

Poets’ different notions have discussed through these two poems which is partly opposites about Pardah. Dharker condemns pardah as attire which oppresses and curbs the rights of the muslim women. But Sarojini Naidu deviates from Dharker point of view that pardah protects muslim women as a shield from the harmful eyes of men. Eventually Quranic verses and Prophet Sayings indicate pardah as a dignity and safety for muslim women from the evils and sexual harassment. Pardah is not a particular dress for muslim women but they have to cover some particular parts of their body especially private parts. So it is designed as pardah. There is no exact dress for muslim women in Islam. All men and women are equal in Islam.

There is no bias between women and men in Islam but they have biological, psychological changes which is manageable and alterable.

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