

"The Pardha Nashin": Analysis

Sarojini Naidu was an Indian poetess and activist, known as the "Nightingale of India". She advocated for India's independence, social welfare, and equal rights. The "Pardha" or "Ghungat" or "Burqa" is a religious and social practice of seclusion in some Hindu and Muslim communities of South Asia. Women are either physically separated from males using separate buildings, screens, walls, or curtains or they may be concealed by loose clothing and veils.

Her life is a revolving dream
Of languid and sequestered ease;
Her girdles and her fillets gleam
Like changing fire on sunset seas,
Her raiment is like morning mist,
Shot opal, gold and amethyst.

From thieving light & eyes impure,
From coveting sun or wind's caress,
Her days are guarded and secure
Behind her carved lattices,
Like secrets in lover's breast.

But though no hand unsanctioned darts
Unveiled the mysteries of her grace,
Time lifts the curtain unawares,

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And sorrow looks into her face...
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?

'Pardha Nashin' is a representative poetic piece depicting the plight of Indian women (both in Hindu and Muslim communities) dominated by men. They were looked upon as sex objects. They had no freedom. They were like birds in a decorated cage.

In the first stanza of the poem, the poetess describes the life of women behind the veil; they had plenty of comforts and ease, dressed in their costly attires and jewelry that made them look beautiful and sensuous. They sat behind the veils waiting to entertain their masters.

In the second stanza the poet further describes how the women lived guarded and protected behind artistically carved lattices not allowed to be seen by lecherous men or even touched by the rays of sun or wind. They lived hidden like secrets hidden in lover's heart.

In the last stanza, the poetess describes that though no unauthorized hands could lift the veils behind which she lived, yet when time

lifted those veils, it was found they were sorrowful and there were tears in their eyes; no one tried to prevent their suffers and tears.

Now the question is "who can shield a woman's eye from tears? Her liberties are the thing of our concern. A "Pardha Nashin" or veil donning woman is the subject of our discussion around which everything moves. Our conventions, taboos and orthodoxies too have taken toll upon the freedom of the females. God cannot remain hidden under the earth. So is the case with. Nothing is hidden from time. The Pardha system has the goodness and weakness of its own. But instead of doing some good, it does so much to our society. Feminine liberty and freedom is all that attaches to and human right activists and feminists are concerned about. Too much of taboos and restriction is not good.

The poem is in ballad form with almost 20 lines. It has alternate rhyme scheme like ababcc deddxx xbebebb. The closest metre employed in poem is iambic tetrameter, whereas closest stanza type was tercets.