

An old woman essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



An old woman clutches a tourist's sleeve and tags along with him. She wants a ' fifty paise coin'. For this she offers to show him ' the horseshoe shrine'. This refers to a legend centred around a horse-shoe shaped depression in a rock about Khandoba, the presiding deity at Jejuri, who leaped from that rock onto his horse as he carried his wife with him. This is a legend that the true believer reveres and the sceptic doubts. The tourist moves away as he has seen the shrine already. The old woman ' tightens her grip' and ' hobbles' along – not giving up so easily. She is persistent. She clings to him like a ' burr' – a prickly seed pod that clings to clothes. Irritated by this persistence, the tourist decides to ' face her' with an ' air of finality' — he decides that he will not yield to her and thereby wants to put an end to the ' farce'. He presumes that his no nonsense reaction will deter her. But the old woman's matter of fact question – ' what else' could an ' old woman' do to survive on these ' wretched hills' – strikes the narrator like a thunderbolt.

The stark reality that hits the narrator allows him to ' see' her at closer quarters. When he turns to look at her face, he is shocked. There are two deep sunken eyes that look like bullet holes. Her skin is wrinkled and cracks begin to appear around her eyes and spread beyond her skin. He feels that everything is falling apart. Everything is cracked and in ruins. The cracks spread beyond her skin to the hills and the sky. There is a catastrophe. The hills crack, the temples crack and the sky falls and shatters like a sheet of glass. But the old woman stands there as a symbol of all round degradation. The narrator feels ashamed. He is reduced to the small change in her hand. In a moment of realization the narrator/tourist finds himself reduced in his self-esteem. His awakening to the ' real' world makes him feel ' small' — as

insignificant as the small coin he gave the old woman. The poem persuades its readers to give thought to this simple yet never-ending reality of life — old age and poverty.

An Old Woman is a pen picture drawn of a beggar woman who is old and alone. She is a self-appointed guide for the tourists in Jejuri, seeking to make easy money from some unsuspecting tourists. She is persistent and so 'grabs hold' of the narrator's sleeve and 'tags along' with him. The poem gives its readers a lucid picture of the beggar woman and her begging. Her demands are simple: she wants 'a fifty paise coin' only and for this she is prepared to 'take' the tourist to see the 'horse-shoe shrine', which he has already seen. Though a beggar, she shows that she has some ethics. She intends to render service for a small token (50 paise coin).

Her instincts of survival drive her to 'stick' like a 'burr' and not let go of the narrator. This kind of persistence can get irksome. It prompts the narrator/tourist to take one firm and final stand. With a tone of 'finality' he turns around wanting to call an end to the farce. But it becomes impossible for him to ignore her when she asks: What else can an old woman do on hills as wretched as these? This stark question confounds the narrator and forces him to face the old woman. As he looks closely at her face, her eyes appear like 'bullet holes', through which he can see the sky. It seems to him as if were looking into the very emptiness of her soul. He sees the cracks - wrinkles - around her eyes and they seem to spread beyond her; he feels the hills crack, the temples crack and the sky fall around him as he shattering realisation dawns on him. With this realisation the world as he

knew it seems to fall apart, disintegrating into so much rubble. But the old woman stands indestructible and alone. She is the reality that will not be hidden.

The narrator's world, at this moment, is reduced to the pile of small change in her hand – the sop that we pay to our conscience while actually neglecting our duty. What had appeared to the narrator as a 'farce' was in reality a compulsion for the old woman for her survival. There is nothing else she can do now at this stage of being abandoned by her family in her old age. Her wrinkles of old age force the poet to think about this stage of life and our role in extending a helping hand towards the old and needy. In a civilised society we have a responsibility towards those who cannot take care of themselves – this is, after all what civilisation is all about. How her plight is symbolic of the decay in our lives: The old woman raises questions in the poet's mind and in the readers' mind reminding us of responsibility of ours in society. The old woman pricks the conscience of the narrator with her question.

The cracks around her eyes which are reflected in the cracks in the hills and the temples are the symbols of neglect and the resulting deterioration in civilisation standards. The poet points out, through this metaphor, that society, far from progressing, is actually declining, and will soon collapse. This is because we are ignoring the old and poverty-stricken who are the responsibilities of the fit and well-to-do in a civilised society. Yet the 'shatterproof crone' stands alone, reminding us that however far we may progress, our success is only measurable by the extent to which we exert

ourselves to take care of the less fortunate in our society. It is the narrator who is shattered by the reality — he begins to feel small in the presence of the old woman, who forces him to accept the reality of her existence.

The theme An Old Woman-Arun Kolatkar In Arun Kolatkar's poem, "An Old Woman," the main theme is about keeping what is important in perspective — in this case, an old woman and her heritage — the land from which she comes. Someone may be walking and a woman may grab a hold of his or her sleeve. For a price, she will take what seems to be a sightseer to a nearby shrine. The man will not be interested: he has seen the shrine before. However, the woman will be insistent; the man may want to dismiss her because she is an old woman, and they cling and won't let go.

The man will turn, about to end their association, to put her in her place and demand that she leave, but she will look at him and explain that there is little else left for an old woman to do in the hills where she abides: how can she live? She seems to imply. The shock the man receives is looking at the sky, perhaps as blue as the woman's eyes: but what stops him is the sense that her eyes are like bullet holes — this image is shocking and riveting, as is, perhaps, his enlightened perception of this woman and her connection to this old land. The man will note that as he looks at the woman, and the cracks around her eyes, the cracks will seem to spread to the landscape around her: to the hills, the temples and even the sky.

But he will see, as he watches, that even though the sky may fall and shatter around her, she is untouched: "shatterproof." In the midst of the life that has reduced her to trying to earn some money as a guide for tourists, and

seen only an old woman to the tourists — not worth their time and barely worth their notice — her resolve is strong. She is a part of the land, as old as it is: she is as immovable. She lives, the man will see, with what is made available to her. It would seem that in the face of the man's realization, he will feel as if he has been reduced to nothing more than his money, for he does not have that kind of connection to his land or his heritage. And perhaps, in light of the trials and tribulations of life, he is really the unimportant one — beyond the small change in his pocket — but she stands, unbreakable and strong.