



## Imtiaz Dharker

### KEYWORDS

*Giardia spp., Dogs, prevalence, Beijing*

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Imtiaz Dharker is one of the major female voices of the post – modernistic phase of Indian English poetry. She has had her social and cultural growth in Pakistan, England and India. She records her lived experience in her books of poetry. Home, freedom, geographical and cultural displacement, communal conflict, gender politics – these are the recurrent themes in her poetry. She lives with the passion of a fearless rebel, not to retreat and not to fail. Her expression is honest and has the courage of conviction. She has not allowed her orthodox religion to rob her of her potentialities. No wonder, her rebellion has caused a flutter among the guardians of orthodox religion and the custodians of culture. Arundhati Subramaniam notes that in Imtiaz Dharker's poetry, **"There is an exultant celebration of a self that strips off layers of superfluous identity with grace and abandon, only to discover that it has not diminished, but grown larger, generous, and more inclusive."** An accomplished artist and documentary film maker, Imtiaz is an important presence in the world of Indian poetry in English.

One of the major concerns in Imtiaz Dharker's poetry is to present the hollowness of the socio – cultural and socio – religious restrictions on women which have robbed them of their potentialities. With subtle artistry, she presents her new perspectives on the suppressed and silenced womanhood. The coolness of treatment makes the expression very effective. A critic observes, "Imtiaz Dharker's humanistic and feministic concerns with her anguish and agony, sympathy and protest give the message silently, though it's deafening explosion has been felt everywhere." The social and cultural traditions insulting the individuality of a woman are seen in new light and new perspectives in her poetry.

Imtiaz Dharker's poem 'Purdah – I' is a silent protest and an eloquent criticism of the purdah tradition strictly imposed on Muslim women. A socio – religious practice is seen as a symbol of repression upon women. Our attention is focused on the turning point in the life of a Muslim girl when she suddenly becomes conscious of her sexual growth, and others are perhaps more conscious:

"One day they said

She was old enough to learn some shame

She found it came quite naturally."

**A woman is not born; she is made.** The conservative society is very cautious and conscious. It must teach a woman some manners, decorum and dignity. She is asked to hide her body behind a piece of cloth.

To be covered from head to toe in the black veil has greater socio – religious association for Muslim women whether educated or uneducated, advanced or backward, rich or poor. **Imtiaz Dharker sees purdah as open violation of the basic rights, freedom and dignity of women.** She revolts against this practice in order to regenerate female psyche. Purdah is compared with a coffin. A lifeless body exists within both:

"Purdah is a kind of safety,

The body finds a place to hide,

The cloth fans out the skin,

Much like the earth that falls

On coffins after they put the dead men in."

However, the poem is about being a woman and not just a Muslim woman. Eunice de Souza regards Purdah **"not just a concealing garment but as a state of mind."** Imtiaz Dharker herself has admitted: "I don't see myself as a spokeswoman for the community. I feel that woman generally is too accepting of the guilt they always feel." Purdah is suppressive and deadening of the intellectual awakening and growth of a woman. It is a wall between the woman and the world. It curbs and restricts the speech and expression. It is a repression of will and choice.

The programmed minds behind the Purdah know behaviour and a code of conduct. There is an awareness of guilt in case of any violation of a code of conduct:

"Carrying carefully what we do not own

between the thighs a sense of sin."

People around her are the same. But their looks are changed and with a purpose. The hypocritical and secretive eyes constantly examine her. **She is taught behaviour by the un-learning people.**

Imtiaz Dharker has broadened the thematic concerns of Indian English poetry by exploring her immediate social surroundings. The poem 'Another Woman' presents a woman who is a representative of so many women of Indian subcontinent for whom life is not their choice. The poem describes the brutality and inhumanity with which women are disposed off after being exploited in the worst possible manner. The woman in the poem is typical woman of the Indian sub-continent. She is accomplished in her homemaker's role:

"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;

But her care and concern goes unrewarded. The abuses and

curses are hurled at her. Ironically all her domestic virtues fail to find for her a welcome presence in the family she is married into. Her parents are cursed.

The destiny of the woman in the traditionally oppressive society presented in a very touching way:

"This was the house she had been sent to

The man she had been bound to

The future she had been born into."

Nothing in her life was chosen by her. Yet she was to endure the undeserving suffering till she is killed or she kills herself. Only death ends her anguish and agony:

"So when the kerosene was thrown

.....

It was the only choice

That she had ever known."

The title 'Another Woman' ironically shows the tragic fate of a woman as a casual happening. The phrases 'Another torch', 'Another Woman' refer to the inhuman aspect of the much prattled about Indian culture.

Intiaz Dharker writes with the aim of rejuvenating the wounded female psyche. As she admits, "Knowing you have traditionally been a victim doesn't make you a victim if you can see and assess what has happened to you." The poem 'Battle – line' scrutinizes man – woman relationships in the modern context. The lovers or husbands and wives are like two nations with lines demarcating their territories. Of course there are some checkpoints on the border which are demolished at will. The relationship of temporary love and convenience is summed up in terse idiom:

"Distrustful lovers

Who have fought bitterly

And turned their backs

But in sleep, drifted slowly

In, moulding themselves

Around the cracks

To fit together,

Whole again; at peace."

The hostilities are forgotten during night. Morning brings a sense of new attack. The absence of warmth in the man – woman togetherness creates a mechanical living. Lovelessness and convenient form of togetherness brings a sense of vacuity:

"Having come home

All you can do is leave."

Intiaz Dharker's work has been described by Bruce King as "consciously feminist, consciously political, consciously that of a multiple outsider." There is the subtle and delicate use of irony in her poems. But it is clear that she uses irony more as a message than a weapon. Weapon often fails the message never. She has successfully demolished the religious and cultural barriers prescribed by the patriarchal society.