**An Old Woman**

[**Arun Kolatkar**](https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/an-old-woman-2/arun-kolatkar)

An old woman grabs  
hold of your sleeve  
and tags along.  
  
She wants a ﬁfty paise coin.  
She says she will take you  
to the horseshoe shrine.  
  
You've seen it already.  
She hobbles along anyway  
and tightens her grip on your shirt.  
  
She won't let you go.  
You know how old women are.  
They stick to you like a burr.  
  
You turn around and face her  
with an air of ﬁnality.  
You want to end the farce.  
  
When you hear her say,  
‘What else can an old woman do  
on hills as wretched as these?'  
  
You look right at the sky.  
Clear through the bullet holes  
she has for her eyes.  
  
And as you look on  
the cracks that begin around her eyes  
spread beyond her skin.  
  
And the hills crack.  
And the temples crack.  
And the sky falls  
  
with a plateglass clatter  
around the shatter proof crone  
who stands alone.  
  
And you are reduced  
to so much small change  
in her hand.

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Arun Balkrishna Kolatkar (November 1, 1932 – September 25, 2004) was a poet from Maharashtra,India. Writing in both Marathi and English, his poems found humor in many everyday matters. His poetry had an influence on modern Marathi poets. His first book of English poetry, Jejuri, is a collection 31 poems pertaining to a visit of his to a religious place with the same name Jejuri in Maharashtra; the book won Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1977.[1] His Marathi verse collection Bhijki Vahi won a Sahitya Akademi Award in 2005. His Collected Poems in English, edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, was published in Britain by Bloodaxe Booksin **2010.**

**Glossary**

Tag - follow closely

Burr - force his/her company on others

Farce - deal

Wretched - miserable

Crone - an ugly old woman

Clatter - the sound of the hard objects

Air of finality - the impression that there is nothing more to be said or done.

Plate glass - glass of fine quality used for doors, mirrors.

**COMPREHENSION I**

1. ‘You’ in the poem refers to the speaker.

2. What does the old woman offer to do?

The old woman offers to be a tourist guide.

3. What does she expect for her service?

She expects fifty paise coin for her service.

4. The lines, ‘You turn around and face her with an air of finality’ suggest that he decided to end the farce.

5. The old woman’s eyes are compared to bullet holes.

6. ‘You are reduced to so much small change in her hand’ Here, the speaker is suggesting that One feels a change in one’s personality.

**COMPREHENSION II**

**1. How is the plight of the old woman depicted in the poem?**

Arun Kolatkar is a bilingual Poet. An Old Woman is selected from Jejuri, a collection his of poems. In the poem **The old woman,** he has tried to create is the one who represents our culture, our heritage and our natural beauty. Initially it seems that she is little adamant when speaker refuses to give her any money. But, it also shows how she does not resolve to beggary. She wishes to take the speaker to the horse shoe shrine; in return she demands a mere fifty paisa coin. Poverty and old age are two curses that can cripple a person and make him utterly helpless. The old woman is shown as a helpless woman who laments saying “What else can an Old Woman do on hills as wretched as these?”

**2. The Old Woman in the poem is a self-appointed tourist guide, not a beggar. Do you agree? Give reasons.**

Arun Kolatkar is a bilingual Poet. An Old Woman is selected from Jejuri, a collection his of poems. Yes, I agree that the old woman is a self-appointed tourist guide and not a beggar. She is asking a 50 paisa coin in return for taking the speaker round the Horse-Shoe Shrine. This shows that she does not want to beg but wants to earn her living in the only way she knew. She appears happy to receive wages after forcing the visitor to get her guidance about the place.

**3. How does the Speaker’s attitude undergo a change?**

The old woman he has tried to create is the one who represents our culture, our heritage and our natural beauty. Initially it seems that she is little adamant when speaker refuses to give her any money. But, it also shows how she does not resolve to beggary. She wishes to take the speaker to the horse shoe shrine; in return she demands a mere fifty paisa coin. Poverty and old age are two curses that can cripple a person and make him utterly helpless. The old woman is shown as a helpless woman who laments saying “What else can an Old Woman do on hills as wretched as these?” The Speaker looks into her eyes and realizes she is right. Her helplessness because of her old age moves him. He is also touched by the fact that she wants to earn the fifty paisa coin by showing him the horse shoe shrine rather than demanding it as a charity. All this brings about a change in his approach and attitude.

**2. What is the Speaker trying to convey through the lines ‘and the hills crack, and the temples crack, and the sky falls’?**

The old woman he has tried to create is the one who represents our culture, our heritage and our natural beauty. The Speaker highlights the fact that growing old is not just for the living forms it also applies to the non living forms like the hills and the temples. ‘Cracks’ are simply a sign of old age. It is a natural process that

**3. How do you relate the ‘cracks around her eyes’ to the cracking of hills and temples?**

‘Cracks’ are simply a sign of old age. Age is an important factor. As the age passes by it starts leaving its ugly impact on the body. With the passage of time even the hills and temples which were strong earlier develop cracks. It is a natural process. The ‘cracks around her eyes’ are symbolic of her old age and rich experience. It also talks about the wisdom that comes with age. The hills and temples represent the same wisdom and dignity that a woman stands for. The old woman and the hills have been around for centuries. Inspite of being old, the woman is able to carry on and find means to keep her life going just like the hills and the temples.