

## A Critical Study on the Poetry of K. N. Daruwalla

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study deals with the place of Daruwalla among Indian Poets in English. It presents the craftsmanship of Daruwalla in detail. It also the range of Daruwalla's poetry. Study of this kind deserves special attention on the different dimensions of the Indian English poets associated with a traditional society, different culture and leadership activities of this specific life in our country. It is significant to study the services of poets rendered to Indian writing in English and the cultural values related to this country. Finally, Daruwalla's significance in the context of Indian poetry in English is established. This study critically examines the contemporary poets of Indian writing in English who had been historically favoured in poetry for a society that had lived for a millennium by a value system based on division and hierarchy, classically manifested in the system of caste-feudal patriarchy. The post-independent Constitutional commitment to social equality and social justice marked a watershed in its historical evolution. This study is significant to know the poetic status of Daruwalla, and his services to the Indian writing in English.*

### 1. Introduction

Daruwalla is a poet of social awareness and a leading figure in Indian Poetry in English today. Critics maintain that his concern for broad landscape imagery rather than political and social issues is a result of his long career as a police officer. He readily admits critics' charges of being too much of a landscape poet who takes to in his aesthetic stride the sights and sounds of England, Yugoslavia, Helsinki, Stockholm, Volgograd and Moscow.

The characteristic features of his poetry can be described as vigour and immediacy of language, knife-edge tone, an abiding and infatuated concern with love, death and domination, a sceptic and indignant cynicism about the plight of human society and a rare intensity of portraying living individual. In his poetry, Daruwalla portrays beautiful landscape. His thematic canvas transcends the boundaries of India and stretches itself to in the rest of the world. His poetry is marked for its narrative strength and capacity to paint a picture for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independent India as a landscape of meaninglessness: His poetry also offers a fine tuned vision of a

particular which is evident in his evocation of the rumbling innards of a miserable multitude listening to the speech of a corpulent political leader.

While reading the poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla one is bound to have the feeling that he is being transported to a bizarre world. No other Indian – English poet delves so deep into the mysterious inner world of the human psyche as does Daruwalla. His poetry is conspicuous for the expression of Indian socio-political conditions both in cities and countryside.

His attitude towards nature will remind one of Tennyson. His morbid pre-occupation with death will remind one of Emily Dickinson. His supernaturalism will remind the reader of Coleridge. His poetry as a heap of broken images will remind us of the poetic technique of T.S. Eliot. Daruwalla glorifies love and celebration of sex as a typical Indian. His profession as a police officer provided him opportunities to observe life in India in all its manifestations. It enriched his knowledge of human nature and life. He stands out among other Indian English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit of poets.

## **2. The Literary Achievements of Keki N. Daruwalla**

Indian Poetry in English is very much indebted to Daruwalla. His contributions to Indian Writing in English especially, verse is remarkable. He had enriched Indian Poetry in English through his range and craftsmanship. His poems have thrived to bring the undercurrent of Indian life. His corpus of poems has echoed the Indian spirit and its sensibility. His poems are deeply rooted in Indian idiom. His poems are the quaint essence of Indian sensibility and Indian life. Violence is the foremost theme of the poetry of Daruwalla. The violence pervades the works of Daruwalla both thematically and technically. However, it depicts the multi ethnicity of the Indian experience. His poetry presents the cross sections of India. Indian poetry sans Daruwalla is unimaginable as his poetry has become an inevitable force in the annals of Indian writing in English. His poems are devoid of any inferior poetic utterances. His images are so sound and it strikes the head at the right time. His poetic exuberance is matchless. His poetry is of high quality, dandy, sterling and first class. His poetic acumen is of highest calibre.

Walking on untrodden paths will be sizzling. Similarly for poets to write on unexplored areas. M. Prasad observes,

Daruwalla treads higher to unexplored terrains to search out unorthodox subjects on which to direct his critical gaze. With a sharp sense of unsparing satire, he highlights contradictions, paradoxes, ironies, hypocrisies, stupidities, violence and corruption the contemporary Indian life is replete with it. (20)

Vikram Raj Urs appreciates Daruwalla for “his fine critical acumen and creative judgment” (90). For his recognition of his literary works, he was honoured with several awards. Particularly, the Sahitya Akademi honoured him with its Award in 1984 for his poetical work *The Keeper of the Dead*. Some years later, Commonwealth Poetry Award was given to him. His sixth volume of the collections of poems, entitled *Landscapes* was published in 1987. The Volume paints various landscapes taken from home and abroad. His other poetry collections are *A Summer of Tigers* (1995), *Night River* (2000) and *The Map-maker* (2002). *Swords and Abyss* (1979) and *The Minister for Permanent Unrest & Other Stories* (1996) are his works of fiction.

Krishna Rayan in his review of Daruwalla's *A Summer of Tigers*, writes:

To turn from Kamala Das to Keki N. Daruwalla is a transition from the lyrical to the dramatic, from the tortuous alleys of solipsistic contemplation of oneself amid a web of personal relationships to the high ways of external reality, a seemingly infinite universe of variegated and incandescent colour, shifts of light, and the play of unnumerable patterns and shapes. Yet it is not a one-dimensional tapestry with a merely visual impact, but a human world of turmoil, violence, cruelty, pain, laughter, love hope, compassion. (180)

Daruwalla has been one of the most darling innovators of Indian poetry in English. Never compromising either with the public or indeed with language itself, he has followed his belief that poetry should aim at a representation of the complexities of modern civilization in language and that such representation necessarily leads to difficult poetry. Despite this difficulty his influence on modern poetic diction has been immense.

### 3. Landscape in the Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla

Daruwalla is known for his portrayal of landscape in his poems. About this A.N. Dwivedi comments,

One of the characteristic traits of Daruwalla's poetry is its preoccupation with the portrayal of landscape in its variegated moods and aspects. His landscape is usually related to the vast countryside of North India, with its widespread network of rivers, hills, plains and pastures. Where it is not merely decorative, it asserts its presence on the mind and heart of the reader (163).

"The Ghaghra in Spate" presents the terrible aspect of riverscape. The poem reflects the poet's minute observation of the moods and changing colours of the river:

*In the afternoon she is a grey smudge  
Exploring a grey canvas.  
When dusk reaches her  
Through an overhang of cloud  
She is overstewed coffee.  
At night under the red moon in menses  
She is a red weal  
Across the spine of the land. (26-33)*

In this poem the terror-stricken villagers are seen fighting against the flooded river,-a fact that has been recorded with compassion and understanding. Poems from the Terai and Under Orion portray vividly the low-lying, mosquito infected area of the Terai. "The Parijat Tree" depicts the gentle and calm mood of nature. "Snowman", "Pilgrimage to Badrinath," "The Old Man of the Sea" etc. are some of the finest nature poems in Apparition in April. Mark the picturesque description of mountain scape:

*Stony eyes turn northward toward stone  
And the grey austerity in the stance of hills;  
The snow-hush under granite skies  
And the wind biting like the dentist's drill,  
Whipping the mist into a horizon.  
("Pilgrimage to Badrinath" 5-9)*

#### **4. Themes of Deprivation, Despair, Disease and Death**

Keki N. Daruwalla's poetry is rooted in the darker sides human existence. Most of his poems are violent in nature. The images are also coarse and baser. The themes of deprivation, despair, disease and death are common in his poems. This chapter deals with Daruwalla's portrayal or depiction of deprivation, despair, disease and death. Already the socio-creative acumen of the poet has been established; and now very much found or influenced by his professional affiliation, the chapter delves further into the poetic art of Daruwalla in terms of socio-cultural realities which in a way enshrined or embedded in his work through deprivation, despair, disease and death. These themes are parallel to the social maladies which are a part of Indian existence. Shabnam Jhuremalani writes about Daruwalla's selection of themes.

His selections of subjects from the "indiscriminate chaos of experience" reveal a definite assurance seeking tendency. However, he exercises his artistic autonomy by making his poems conscious orientative acts, never letting go of his belief in the communicative, edifying function of literature. His critiques are never sterile, and the torrents of descriptive statement are part of his quest, perhaps, to explore the cult of beauty in different forms. (32)

Daruwalla is determined to avoid sentimentality, but deprivation and misery, disease and death move him acutely. "The King speaks to the Scribe" gives expression to the heart-felt sorrow of the King, when he faced the ugly reality of war. Misery caused by death is the major theme of the poem. The King tells the scribe that he wishes his readers to draw from this historical record the lesson of humility from what had happened. There is no question of any pride in him now when he wants these events to be recorded. There has been a lot of bloodshed, he says; and the lesson to be drawn from it has to be inscribed on rocks so that it may acquire a permanent life and an enduring validity.

Nothing can save the persons who perpetrated this enormous slaughter. No purpose would be served by framing a law of piety; and not purpose would be served by teaching the people now that deeds are difficult to perform while misdeeds are easy. Also there would be no point in making any reference to the austerity measures which must now be adopted in his palace. The time of lavish feasting and merry-making is over.

#### **5. Satiric Tone and Techniques in the Poetry of K.N. Daruwalla**

In satire and sarcastic tone of poetic expression there is no match for Daruwalla. He is so skilful in presenting the social reality tinged with a note or tone of irony. Most of his poems revolving on social themes are not bereft of Sarcastic marks. His poems present the structure of the society very much rooted in hypocrisies social maladies.

In his famous poem “Curfew in a Riot Torn City” he frankly describes disintegration of social life by communal violence:

*The starch on your Khadi back  
Torns soggy, the feel of things is queer  
You wish to forget it all  
The riot, the town, the people  
-that mass of liquefied flesh  
Seeking in fear. (15-20)*

The poem entitled “The people” is another of Daruwalla’s triumphs in the field of irony and satire. The very opening two lines are an example:

*Between their raillery and applause  
I found no difference. (14-15)*

The satiric tone and techniques in his poetry show his relationship with people and society. A.J. Thomas considers Daruwalla as one of the strong voices around in Indian Poetry like, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan Arun Kolatkhar, Dom Moraes and so an “For Keki, poetry always had an umbilical cord relationship with society and life”

## 6. Summing Up

Daruwalla’s distinctive technical skills, the special subtlety in his adaptation of a very personal colloquial mode to the demands of tight forms, are not immediately seen to be outstanding; but his strengths as a craftsman have increasingly come to be regarded as one of the hallmarks of his talent. He is an extraordinarily various and accomplished poet, a poet who uses the devices of metre and rhyme for specific effects. His language is never flat, unless he intends it to be so for a particular reason, and his diction is never stereotyped. He is always ready to reach across accepted literary boundaries for a word that will precisely express what he intends. He produced without fanfare the most technically brilliant and resonantly beautiful, profoundly disturbing yet appealing and approachable, body of verse of any Indian English poet in the last twenty-five years or more.

The elegance of his poetic diction, brilliance and dexterity of his craftsmanship coupled with the Indian sensibility has made his poetic presence inevitable in the Indian context. Though he is a Parsi, his poems are more Indian rather than a Parsi. To transform a minor incident or insignificant event into a poetic expression of higher caliber requires an enormity of craftsmanship and technical excellence. Daruwalla possesses that capacity to a greater extent in combining reason

and sentiment without sacrificing the grace. Apart from poetry he also attempted fiction. His career as a poet spanning thirty six years and more has been contributing remarkably for the growth of Indian literature especially poetry.

The study has found that the poetic genius of Daruwalla is unmatched. Keki N. Daruwalla's poetry is of immense importance in comparison with other poets of eminence. Daruwalla has become a tour de force of Indian poetry in English.

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