RESEARCH REVIEW JOURNALS
Volume-04
Issue-03
March -2019

ISSN: 2455-3085 (Online)
RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary
www.rrjournals.com [UGC Listed Journal]

Indianness in the Poetry of Keki N. Daruwala

Dipka J. Patel

1. Introduction

Keki N. Daruwalla is one of the foremost contemporary Indian poets who write in English. Daruwalla did all his growing up in India so it is natural for him to describe Indian scenes and people of this country. Daruwalla's poetry, like the poetry of his equally gifted contemporaries is nothing if not Indian. An Indian poet has to have the recognizably Indian elements in him if he is any good An Indian poet can be an expatriate an can write about alienation and rootlessness, but even then, in his artistic meditation of experience, he will remain essentially Indian. Daruwalla is neither an expatriate nor is an alienated from Indian life and therefore discovering the 'Indian' element in him is emphasizing the obvious. His poetry is suffused with the varied aspects of Indian sensibility. His poetry is conspicuous for the vivid and picturesque portrayal of the variegated landscape of North India. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1984.

With the publication of his very first book, Under Orion in 1970, Daruwalla established himself as a name to reckon with in Indian poetry. Senior Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel applauded his work as "impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness". Over nine books and more than three decades, Daruwalla's poetry has journeyed a long way both formally and thematically. However, it retains certain strong distinguishing characteristics: an ironic stance, an evocation of the multi-layered contradictory realities of Indian life, a preoccupation with diverse cultural, historic and mythic landscapes, a terse, vigorous and tensile style, supple imagism, sustained narrative drive, an ability to see between metrical patterns and free verse, and a capacity to combine an epic canvas with a miniaturist's eye for detail.

Daruwalla's poetry is suffused with the varied aspects of Indian sensibility. His poetry is conspicuous for the vivid and picturesque portrayal of the variegated landscape of North India. The background is often surrounded by his immediate surroundings-by a Ganga, a Ghaghra, a Chambal valley, a Tarai, a Varansi, a Haridwar, a Rishikesh and a Badrinath. To quote:

The journey to Badrinath is difficult;
Along the valley of the burning sun;
On flinty bridle-paths which centuries have trod
In penance and anonymous dust,
The caravan of pain proceeds towards the gods
Stny eyes turn northward towards stone
And the grey austerity in the stance of hills;
The snow hush under granite skies
And the wind biting like a dentist's drill,
Whipping the mist into a horizon.
(Apparition in April, p.22)

This background is associated with legends and myths drawn from remote antiquity. He freely uses words which are indicative of rituals and religious aspects of Hindus; such as "mantra", "gayatri", "pind-dan", "panchtirtha", "ashram", "ardhakumbh" etc. The purification rituals extend to his poetry to tradition, to myth and to the symbolic, even spiritual dimension.

Daruwalla's third book, Crossing of Rivers makes use of the river motifs in many ways. Social, religious and cultural aspects of a river are brought to life in vivid and vibrant poetry. Ganga is the central metaphor in this book. "Boat-Ride Along the Ganga", the first poem in Crossing of Rivers, reverses the perspective in the sense that here the land is seen from the river and not the other way round. The poet, riding upstream a motor-boat at dusk, is part of the river:

Slowly the ghat-amphitheatre unfolds
Like a diseased nocturnal flower in a dream
That opens its petals only at dusk.
Palm-leaf parasols sprouting like freak-mushrooms
Brood over platforms that are empty.
(Crossing of Rivers, p.11)

Inspite of observing the sacred notions, he was never comfortable with Indian hypocrisy particularly those pertaining to Hindu rituals. He observes Hindu holy city Varanasi as a land of despair which is full of repellent sires where physical deformity is flaunted and civic concerns are put aside. "The Waterfront" begins in bafflement at observing the fact that, despite being aware of the sewage emptying in the river, the river is considered sacred. Unlike a large number of Indian poets in English, Daruwalla is never sentimental in depicting the contradictions in Indian life. In a poem, he tells how a woman who has a fit of epilepsy, is taken to a mazar where a religious man will cure her because, it is believed that her disease is some supernatural effect. The woman's husband is advised to take her to the mosque at Bansa:

His hand came up to his tarter beard
in archaic salute.
Take her to the mosque AT Bansa, he said,
On the night prceding
the first Friday of the month.
Insha Allah! She shall be cured.
(Under Orion, p.19)

These aspects are typically Indian. Such things are a part of Indian life. Not only in villages, but in cities and even educated persons sometimes believe in such things. To quote A.N. Dwivedi:

> The poet's attitude towards India and her prevailing malpractices is 'unsparingly unsentimental' and daringly realistic.2

Daruwalla, as a sensitive and able poet, is aware of a number of contradictions, which the Indian society has. A major element in the poetry of Daruwalla is the powerful social criticism. The Middle Ages, a long poem in A Summer of Tigers, brings to light disturbing scenes in Indian life. The poem begins with a reference to the blinding of some prisoners by policemen in Bhagalpur. To quote:

Returning as the leaves fell off the year's branches
Returning as the light swung low into the eyes
To the blindings in Bhagalpur.
The pot-hole in the middle of the eyes;
Someone as traddle on another's chest
Left thumb working the eye into a bulge,
The right hand holding the cycle spoke,
I asked how long can fancy indulge
In such macabre stills?
(A Summer of Tigers, p.62)

A policeman is a symbol of the rule of law, a symbol that has lost much of its sheen in contemporary India. However, violence is not confined to policemen only. There are groups of people who kill others, often helpless people, in the name of caste.

While depicting the contradictions in Indian life, Daruwalla is never sentimental. He gives a realistic portrayal of Indian life. He is deeply rooted in the actuality of living in contemporary India. Daruwalla has frequently written about the hunger and misery of the people in India. In Winter Poems, an entire section is entitles Hunger-74. The opening lines show people waiting for rain:

They sprained their necks looking up for clouds
The light so harsh that corners
Started smoking at the edges.
(Winter Poems, p.25)

Daruwalla stands out among English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit of poets. His experience as a police officer has clearly helped him. He has vividly and minutely portrayed the contemporary Indian socio-political world with touches of irony and sarcasm. He exposes the evils of communal tensions, riots, exploitation, greed, criminalization of politics. Dowry etc. he brings alive the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the roof tops, press communiqués.

Daruwalla is deeply anguished at the institutionalized corruption in free India finds expression in Hunger-74, Monologue in the Chambal Valley, Hawk, Food and Words, and Words and Foods. Profiteers and hoarders make capital out of people's sufferings in drought and famine. Economic disparity, injustice and exploitation give birth to robbers and bandits. Politics has become a means of money-making. Criminals, politicians and officials have formed an unholy nexus. Not many poets in English have this ability to present the misery of the people with such forthrightness and absence of sentimentality. To quote K. Venkatachari:

Alone among the contemporary indo-English poets, Daruwalla plays a 'documentary' role in striving to project the stark reality of India landscape-a home that is at once generative and regenerative of the Indian sensibility.3

A remarkable feature of Daruwalla's poetry is its ability to vividly materialise its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement. His poetry has the narrative energy and sweep to paint, for instance, a vast portrait of post-Independence India as "a landscape of meaninglessness": "Then why should I tread the Kafka beat/ or the Waste Land, / when Mother, you are near at hand/ one vast, sprawling defeat?" His landscapes extend from the ancient kingdom of Kalinga under the reign of the great Indian emperor Ashoka to the seething contradictions of the modern metropolis of Bombay ("From the lepers, the acid-scarred, the amputees/ I turn my face. The road, I feel/ should be stratified so that/ I rub shoulders only with my kind") as well as rural and small-town India (Benaras is unforgettably evoked as the place where "corpse-fires and cooking-fires/ burn side by side", even while the sacred river Ganga flows on, "dark as gangrene").

To conclude, Daruwalla's poetry is concerned with the "Indianness". It has taken for its theme various Indian subjects from legend, folklore to contemporary Indian situations. His poetry is authentic and satisfying because he is deeply rooted in the actuality of living in contemporary India. . He is in the pursuit of creating new idiom in order to give a distinct identity and status to his poetry. Therefore, he does not write his poetry in the conventional English poetic diction and instead he writes in a live Indian English language. His Indian sensibility is reflected through the use of typical Indian symbols and images also.

References

1. Paniker, K. Ayyappa, Indian poetry in English and the Indian Aesthetic Tradition, The Indian Journal of English Studies, 23 1983, p.137.
2. Dwivedi, A.N., K.N. Daruwalla's Poetry: An Assesment, Contemporary Indo-English Verse, Vol.II, A.N. Dwivedi, ed., Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1984, p.171.
3. Venkatachari, K., The Idiom of Autochthon: The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla, Recent Commonwealth Literature, Vol.II. R.K. Dhawan, P.V. Dhamija and A.K. Srivastava, eds., New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1989, p.59.

Works Cited:

1. Daruwalla, Keki N., Apparition in April, Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1971. (All references are from this edition).
2. Daruwalla, Keki N., Crossing of Rivers, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976. (All references are from this edition).
3. Daruwalla, Keki N., Winter Poems, Bombay, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1980. (All references are from this edition).
4. Daruwalla, Keki N., Under Orion, New Delhi: Indus, 1970. (All references are from this edition).
5. Daruwalla, Keki N., A Summer of Tigers, New Delhi: Indus, 1995. (All references are from this edition).

