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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 10: K. N. Daruwalla

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Socio-Political Conditions

- Communal riots (“Curfew in a Riot-torn City”)
- Great Hunger of 1974
- Emergency in 1975



“He (Daruwalla) brings alive the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men robbed at night, lathi blows on cowering back, Soda bottles and acid bottles waiting on the rooftops, press communiques.”(Vilas Sarang)

K. N. Daruwalla- Life and Achievements

- Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla was born in Lahore in January, 1937.
- Educated in Ludhiana, Masters in English
- Parsi Zorastrian Community
- Police Officer
- Winner of Sahitya Akademy Award(1984) and Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1987)
- Landscape poet
- One of the ‘Parsi Quartet’
- Draws from historical events and literary sources.

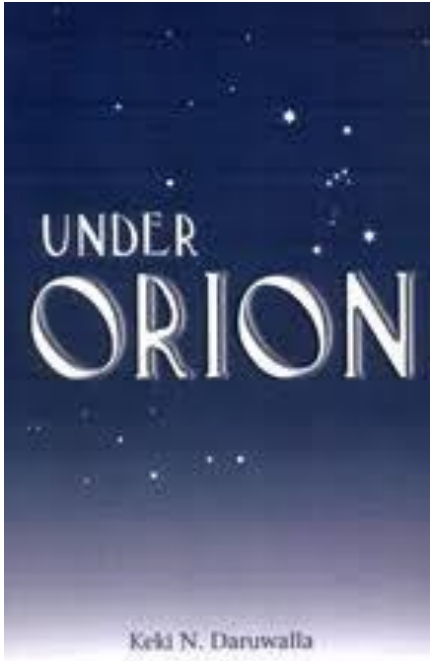


1984

His Poetic Corpus

- *Under Orion* (1970)
- *Apparition in April* (1971)
- *Crossing of Rivers* (1976)
- *Keeper of the Dead* (1982)
- Landscapes (1987)
- *A Summer of Tigers* (1995)
- *Night River* (2000)
- *Fire Altar: Poems of the Persian and the Greeks* (2013)

"Poetry is composed not only in the cerebral cortex but the digestive tracts as well."



(1970)

Urban Poet

- Skilfully paints the landscape and scenes of North India with beautiful plains, pastures, attractive hills and frightening rivers and seas.
- Talks of *thatch-roofs and cow-dung cakes*'
- Wild and mild aspect of society and environment.

"The contemporary Indian socio-political world- not merely the city, but also of small town, village and the countryside is portrayed with heavy strokes, laden with savage irony…" (Vilas Sarang)

A landscape of distance
Of meaningless milestones
Crouching on the flanks
Swallowed in the dust and the express-smoke
The sad-eyed bitch upon the platform
Kicked by the urchins doesn't squeal
Head dropping, eye bored, she walks away.

(Under Orion, p. 72)

Characteristic Features of Daruwalla's Poetry

- ✓ Observational
- ✓ Angry, sceptical and satiric tone
- ✓ Metaphysical dimension than mysticism
- ✓ Sharp awareness of variety in Indian life.
- ✓ Deprivation, misery, disease, death and fire images
- ✓ His religious view characterised by modern scepticism.
- ✓ Political chicanery and hypocrisy
- ✓ Broad range of technique: coinage of unusual words.



Lanes around Juma Masjid
welcome you to their coils
to spire and minaret
amulet and charm
the cry fro baksheesh and the muezzin's call
and the dervish hawking potency drugs
cave erotics call you to their glooms
where goddesses suffer from mastitis
Wounded statuary, one nostril
at Somnath, the other at Ghazni
The river calls: Clay-lamp libation
offered to the eclipse to realise the sun
Ghats aflame with the dead:
Sorry we can't lay on these days
a suttee – display in the flesh for you. ("To Writers Abroad")

“Nightscape”

Votive lights are muzzled in the fog:
Bloodstains on a frosted window.
As the night grows older
As flesh turns to carbon on the ghats
And the river
Keeps moving,
Dark as gangrene,
Temples have to strain their necks
To rise above mist-carves
Wrapped around their shoulders.

Contd...

The fog on the river is like
A loaded raft
Which the current cannot move.
Temple-lights
Are a splash of rhododendrons
And temple-spires, cypress-dark.
Mark the water-front ethereal.
Is this a ridge
Black with pine
Rising out of the mists
Or a city of the dead
Brooding over a ghostscape?

Characteristics of the Poem

"My poems are rooted in landscape which anchors the poem. The landscape is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. It should be the eye of the spiral. I try that poetry relates to the landscape, both on the physical and on the plane of the spirit. For me a riot-stricken town is landscape."

(-Daruwalla, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry)*

- *Crossing of Rivers (1976)*
- Smoke mires the city
- Violence and Death
- Nature and Constructed landscape

A few Lines from “The Ghaghara in Spate”

And every year
the Ghaghra changes course
turning over and over in her sleep.
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 she is a red weal
across the spine of the land.



Contd…

Driving at dusk you wouldn't know
there's a flood ‘on ',
the landscape is so superbly equipoised-
rice-shoots pricking through
a stretch of water and light
spiked shadows
inverted trees
kingfishers, gulls.
As twilight thins
the road is a black stretch
running between the stars.

Contd…

And through the village
the Ghaghra steers her course;
thatch and dung-cakes turn to river-scum,
a buffalo floats over to the rooftop
where the men are stranded.
Three days of hunger, and her udders
turn red-rimmed and swollen
with milk-extortion.
Children have spirit enough in them
to cheer the rescue boats;

Contd…

She flees from the scene of her own havoc
thrashing with pain.
Behind her the land sinks
houses sag on to their knees
in a farewell obeisance.
And miles to the flank, the paddy fields
will hoard the fish
till the mud enters into
a conspiracy with the sun
and strangles them.

Characteristics of the Poem

- From the concluding section of, “Poems from the Terai”
- Impressionistic
- Esthetic distance
- Atmosphere of destruction
- Ariel view of riverscape

“Personification of river as Goddess to create the portrait of a lady in disarray, capricious and unruly as only a female deity can be.”- (Krätli)



Apparitions in April

- Depiction of Indian Culture
- Landscape portrayal
- evocation of the dazzling yet devastating seascape
- Obscure to non-Indian

Each in the cinder-fall finds his small nirvana!
Flame-drops and icon-wash fall on eager palms!
The heart in a moment's surrender to the God-feet
swirls into concentrics of a motion
beyond dynamics. There is no alarm
as the soul thrills to its first passion, while around the walls
is an eternity of snow in passionless calm! (88)
("Pilgrimage to Badrinath")

“To Gandhi”

So , M.K. Gandhi
don’t accuse us of forgetfulness
Once a year
we always remember you
for on Gandhi Jayant
the butchers shut up shops
and we go without mutton. (*Apparitions in April*)

Realistic Portrayal

Perhaps they come to Varanasi
the unloved, the hungry
looking for their soul like
the blind looking for their lost children

In the street of the lord
the sepia teeth of the pandas
in the streets of virginity
the raucous laughter of whores.

I wish to tear myself from all these
the wet lick of the city's fiery tongue
and the sputter of dry sex purchased like fuel..

(Vignettee III, Crossing of Rivers)

Ironic tone

Love for her survives night to night
even though each time
I have to wrestle with her in bed…
flashes her bangles and her tinsels
wears heels even though her feet
are smeared up to the ankles with henna
she will not stick to vindaloo, but talks of
roasts, pies, pomfrets grilled
she speaks of cointreau and cashews
arrack with her father once distilled. (“The Mistress”, *Keeper of the Dead*)

“Draupadi”

The travails of Draupadi
are never-ending.
It seems—some people have it
in their bleeding stars:
first exploited by the Pandavas,
five to one,
then by the Kauravas,
hundred to one
and now by the feminists
in millions.

Disillusionment

We both know what we are here for:
beneath your skin
of wild talk you are tense,
beneath the cindering ash of my body
your body is a surprise
for as I fall upon the earth-crust that is you
we spin, we spin, we spin your feet pointed to the skies.

(“Love among the Pines”)

“Myth-talk”

Are you glad you were not there?
You may not have stood it,
all these animal smells,
the fresh steaming dung
the hay soggy with urine,
the tang of branmash and body-heat
and somewhere the placenta like a bloody undergarment. (59)

[…]
How long must I sacrifice the body
to the soul
the codpiece
to the masterpiece
lost in some vague, aesthetic future? (61)

Poets and Critics on K. N. Daruwalla

- ‘impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness.’ (Ezekiel)

- While Daruwalla might seem to reduce reality to the purely physical and detest those who accept fate do not fight to survive, the actuality of his poems is more complex. There is not only anger at the incompetent, but also a strong ethical and moral consciousness often expressed in savagely satirical comments.” (Bruce King)

Summing up

- Daruwalla's poetic world is grounded in concrete images, characters and situations.
- Dreams, Desire, memory, anguish, deceit, hypocrisy broaden his canvas and lend him a modern voice as a poet's commitment.
- Contraries and contradictions are part of his poetry yet the range and variety of themes enable him to be an Indian English poet who neither ignores Indian imagination nor reduces Indian sensibility but rather attempts to amend reality by correction.

-- I think of sin

As a curio, not an archetype

Hence guilt wears thin

There's nothing much to choose between

A ghostly presence and a ghostly absence

Yet at night sometimes

The ghost –beard haunts me

Burning through my chin. ("Poetry Talk")

Thank You

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