

## Discourse and Style in Keki N. Daruwalla's Poetry

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Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla is a major Indian poet and short story writer in English language. He is awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1984 for his poetry collection, *The Keeper of the Dead*, by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters. The characteristic features of his poetry can also 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 in portraying living individuals. A remarkable feature of Daruwalla's poetry is its ability to vividly materialise its abstractions, to strike a creative tension between image and statement.

Discourse is a term which specifies the way that sentences form a consecutive order, take part in a whole which is homogenous as well as heterogeneous. Therefore, sentences join together in discourse to compose an individual text. Additionally, to create discourse and initiate communication, sentences need to form a cohesive organization in a text such that a context is generated. Style in poetry takes into account the formal constituents of poetry like language, rhythm, and the imagery; for style, after all, is language though it is language that has incorporated in itself elements like the poet's vision, attitudes, moods, thoughts and themes. Since poetic style is an amalgamation of all those constituents of a work of art which are there to express the poet's vision, this study examines the style of the poets from the following perspectives: the imagery; their kinds and effects, symbol, personification, and pathetic fallacy, rhyme and rhythm, repetition and alliteration, Language: diction, sentence structure and form, the poetic attitude and vision or the world view.

Imagery is an essential poetic device that imparts arbitrariness to Daruwalla's language thereby yielding multiplicity of meaning. Since imagery evokes the sensory faculty, the abundance of images in Daruwalla's verses accounts for the sensuousness, and the concreteness of the poetic texts. The images are mostly pictorial and precise with clarity of perception and expression. Daruwalla's

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craftsmanship lies in interweaving the images with the language and thought of the text. The images by being descriptive and forming an indispensable part of the poetic texts, help in the discourse formation through the literal translation of emotion, perception and thought.

Daruwalla is basically a Nature poet; he romanticizes Nature with a sense of ecstasy. There is an abundance of Nature images in the poetry collections *Winter Poems*, *Night River*, *Apparition in April*, *Crossing of River*, *Landscapes* and *Map Maker*. These collections affirm strong emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. They place new emphasis on emotions such as apprehension, horror, terror and awe, especially which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of untamed Nature and its picturesque qualities. Moreover, both the malevolent and the nurturing aspects of Nature convey his understanding of the primal energies of the natural world which stress the absolute otherness of that world and the relationship between these energies and the divided nature of man.

Daruwalla's poetic corpus abounds in dark images with phraseology abounding in drab, disparage, and morbid expressions. The treatment is generally harsh and direct. Images like "dark dreams openings/ to the evening light, / as dusk-fires settle on the snow." (*Caravan from Tibet*, 71-73 *Map Maker*), "...groaning calisthenics of cholera. / Bacteria and bacillus thrive in the wells," (*Pestilence in Nineteenth-Century Calcutta*, 6-7 *The Keeper of the Dead*), "Tossing, I dreamt of you,/ the insides of your head/ rattling like a mummy-wheat/ in a sarcophagus" (*You, Slipping Past*, 6-9 *The Keeper of the Dead*), "...nine generation scorched/ like dying melons on a withered vine./ And now with a face like a patch of fissured bark/ and eyes: pools dulled with a film of moss,... his days slowly embering into ash." (*Meher Ali, the Keeper of the Dead*, 20-26) furnishes the dreary and terrifying ambience to his poetic corpus.

The images drawn from the animal world convey vehemence of nature. R.N. Sinha, *The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla*, while commenting on Daruwalla's handling of animal images writes, "They perform different functions depending on the context of the poem, but whenever they have been used, they have been etched with a sureness of touch, so typical of Daruwalla" (138). Additionally, these animals are mostly wild, for Daruwalla seems to have an obsession for sheer physical power and so his animals are mostly either brutes or deadly predators like 'wolf' (*Landscapes*, 17), 'Haranag' (*Crossing of Rivers*, 52) and 'Hawk' (*The Keeper of the Dead*, 9).

Daruwalla's practice of similes one finds the art of explicit association to be predominantly novice, deep, free from redundancy, and miscellaneous. Additionally, Daruwalla's poetic canvas constitutes the utmost images in which similes abound. He is basically an imagist preferring precision of imagery, and clear sharp language. The analogy for love is essentially drawn from the human body, which intimates erotic love. The persona draws a resemblance of sensation between:

The feel of water over rounded stone,  
like your hand over

the beloved's hip and thigh; (Going Down the Night River,  
36-38 *Night River*)

Daruwalla's images include both abstract and concrete images, in certain examples the progress of description can be from concrete to concrete, abstract to abstract, concrete to abstract, and abstract to concrete. However, his images are more concrete in number than abstract, preferring the action more than the thought. The images of his poetry appeal to the senses.

In Daruwalla's poetry the visual images are evocative, concrete, and suggestive. Additionally, the sharp and vivid perception of the poet imbibes images from both the gloomy and sanguine world. In 'Alankananda' the sensory images of touch, sight and sound overlap and intermingle, and thus combine to produce an aesthetic effect. The lines are:

...and the first snow flake  
like a great white bird,  
and then as blue lightening  
bounced and clattered  
off the ice-bound waste,  
a vision stormed his eyes  
and he saw the stone-god  
in Narakund.

(Alankananda, 31-38 *Map Maker*)

Here, the images of a "spreading strain" and a multitude of black oxen crossing a shallow river are pictorial, descriptive, and kinesthetic. At the same time, the image of "stain" and "black oxen" convey gloominess. Further, "fragments of liturgies" is a poignant visual imagery, with which the poet paints the picture of the funeral pyres which go on multiplying in numbers.

Daruwalla's auditory images parallel the idea and thought of the poetic lines. For instance:

Do you see trains streaming out,  
 ten thousand frying on the lurching roofs?  
 It is our carts rolling today,  
 our villages walking out with their headloads,  
 (Migrations, 36-39, *Landscapes*)

There is a prevalence of the sound 'r' in "train", "streaming", "frying", "lurching" and "roofs" suggesting the sound made by the running trains.

The images are descriptive in nature with slight suggestiveness. The olfactory images in these lines resonates the diseased smell, as in "the air smelling of lightening burns/ like a scorched pelt!" (The Night of the Jackals, 6-7, *The Keeper of the Dead*) However, the image juxtaposes the various senses. Similarly, the stinking and pungent smell of coral firm reminds of the frying fish, "Brittle coral firm as rock, thick smell of frying fish." (This Miracle, 16 *Map Maker*)

There is a quick sense of movement in the images:

First the clouds flashed past like migratory birds.  
 Then in answer to some unheard utterance  
 From the parched lips of this land  
 They settle like birds come to roost. (Calendar,  
 Starting with June, 4-7 *Winter Poems*)

This image transmits the urgency of the poetic mind to that to the text.

The metaphors employed by the poet mostly relate to nature, animal, corporeal, and fantasy. In Nature metaphors like "Next morning she is a coriander leaf/ newly plucked, / rain- washed." (The Night of the Jackals, 82-84 *The Keeper of the Dead*), the association of the lady with the fresh coriander leaf is highly sensuous and also suggests a typical Indian household image. In the suggestion; "his heart is a burning stable packed with whinnying horses" (The Revolutionary, 17 *The Keeper of the Dead*) the comparison of the heart's restlessness with the burning stable punctiliously explicates the mental trauma and the hidden emotions of the character.

Daruwalla's symbols are marked by precision. Certain recurrent images emerge as symbols with multiple connotations. The predominant ones are the river, dream, and the birds of prey. In Night River the "river" (Night River, 34), symbolizes peace, a continuity of

life and sublimity. In poems like 'Vignette I' (Crossing of Rivers, 16) the river is a powerful, sacred entity "swollen with hymns". In 'Vignette II' (Crossing of Rivers 17) the river is thought, "a soundless interior monologue" (Crossing of Rivers 17) in 'Vignette III' the river is "solitude" (Crossing of Rivers 20). Similarly, the river for R.N. Sinha, *The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla*, means "different things at different places, but generally it stands for the principle of change and continuity. Sometimes the image of the river just becomes a symbol of time or experience" (6). Next, is the dream symbolism where the subconscious mind overtakes the conscious through dreams. Poems like 'Dream Log' (*Night River* 36), 'The Room' (*Night River* 37), 'The House' (*Night River* 38), and 'Melons' (*Night River* 40) reinforce the worries, the anxiety, stresses and desires of the conscious mind. In Daruwalla's poetry the birds of prey or the predatory birds work at a symbolic plane. They are symbols of "energy at all levels- primal, natural, physical, sexual and creative" (23) says Asha Viswas in "Landscapes: A Landmark in Keki Daruwalla's Poetry." These birds include hawks, eagles, and vultures. Further, the poet in "The nature of poetry, Keki Daruwalla in dialogue with Geeti Sen" admits that, the depiction of these predator birds is "deliberate, of course, I mean the symbolism is very clear: it refers to aggressiveness..." (230) the Hawk by being a "rapist in the harem of the sky" (Hawk, 15, *The Keeper of the Dead*) is a symbol of revolt against the exploitation of the weak and the innocent.

His language is explored from the perspective of diction, sentence structure, and form. The heterogeneous vocabulary of Daruwalla seems very much a part of the poet's thought process. They remain a key factor of the poet's ability for affective communication apart from attributing aesthetic appeal to them. His poetry is marked by heterogeneous vocabulary and the artistry of forming false impressions. These seem very much a part of the poetic thought process. The use of words from various fields testifies to the poet's artistic skills, experience and powerful imagination. They attribute intellectual appeal and aesthetic effect.

He alludes to the Biblical, Greek and Hindu mythological texts, Zoroastrian, Hindu and Islamic culture, history and literary texts. As noticed in "the hive slept like argus/ its thousand eyes covered with bees" (Suddenly the Tree, 88-89 *Winter Poems*), the panoptic bee hive is associated with the Greek mythic all seeing character Argus Panoptes, a giant with a hundred eyes.

Another feature of language found in Daruwalla's poetry is Prevarication, the ability to make sentences knowing that they are false and with the purpose of misleading the receiver of the information. This is achieved through the exercise of irony. Irony is all pervasive in Daruwalla's social poems. This sense of irony originates from an acute awareness of the facts of life and its situations as essentially unpredictable and paradoxical.

Daruwalla's vision pertains to diverse domains of life. Asha Viswas in "Landscapes: A Landmark in Keki Daruwalla's Poetry," opines on Daruwalla's poetic evolution as, "The growth of consciousness from the mundane to the vast space of the world of nature, from human subjects and man's creation to objects and God's creation is a reflection of the poet's maturity of vision" (21). The evolution can be traced through the artistic vision, social, and philosophical vision. He acquaints his attitude, impression and perception of art and poetic creation through his poetic vision.

The strength of Daruwalla's poetry can be accredited to his ability to construct discourse through his stylistically rich poetic corpus that occurs in the form of copious imagery, ability to shift swiftly between the abstract and the concrete, power of description, free from redundant expressions, compactness and precision in language, vivid ideas and subject matters and a clear poetic vision. Daruwalla's poetic greatness, intensity and comprehensiveness is noticed through the diversity presented in each poetic collections.

Daruwalla's appreciation of beauty affects the world of his imagery and his emotional phrasing. This unique feature of creating imagery develops from a distinct ability to combine picturesque description, striking analogies, and allusions to various places, myths and incidents. His images transcend us to his imaginative world and make us see and feel with him. His language is simple with a linearity of thought. Despite being rich in textual and historical allusions; his poems are the outcome of his wide learning and travels. He with the mode of description, narration, and dramatic monologue enkindles multi-layered contradictory realities of life. Incidence and suspense are two most striking characteristics of his poetry. In Daruwalla the predominant attitude being critical, he adopts irony and bitter satiric tone to express his grudge against the prevailing social values. In Daruwalla there is a depth of feeling, profundity of thought, the richness of subject matter, originality of insight and precision of language. The bitter satiric tone with a perspective that is remarkable for its intense awareness of the

social and political positions and a blend of contemporary with the traditional romantic, Victorian and modern western styles draped into Indian references at once makes his poetry both global and local.

Daruwalla's poetic greatness, intensity and comprehensiveness is noticed through the diversity presented in each poetic collections. The stylistic features of Daruwalla show a keen sensibility for poetic expressions. The images in him are fresh and crystal clear. It may not be wrong to call him an imagist. The imagistic aspect in him aids towards, and enhances the possibility of interplay of expressions or meaning in his poetry. His poetry is more diverse. He has been able to transcend his profession in his latter collections. He is more effective in his literary communication and efficient in the construction of discourse. His texts and poetic ideas are well knitted with a consistency in thought.

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