Works of Keki N. Daruwalla

Introduction

This chapter deals with the place of Daruwalla among Indian Poets Writing in English. This chapter presents the craftsmanship of Daruwalla in detail. It also presents the range of Daruwalla’s poetry. Finally, Daruwalla’s significance in the context of Indian poetry in English is established.

Poetic Genius of Keki N. Daruwalla

The jurisprudence of Keki Daruwalla’s poetry has an immense and scintillating influence on the Indian scenario. His craftsmanship has an impeccable and highly vibrant quality and very much endowed with aesthetic appeal. His themes are varied in nature. His poem ranges from the greatest expression of Indian life to the clever dwelling on mundane experience coupled with reality. His poetic endeavour is superior and excellent in terms of the quality and the poetic device he employs. As a poetic craftsman Daruwalla occupies the unique position in the matrix of Indian poetical spectrum.

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. He poems have thrived to bring the under current 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 quintessence 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 section of India. Indian poetry sans Daruwalla is unimaginable as his poetry has become an inevitable force in the annuls 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. Among Indian poets writing in English Nissim Ezekiel is comparable to Daruwalla. At times Daruwalla even outwits Nissim Ezekiel. Daruwalla’s technique is sounder than that of Ezekiel. In certain poems Daruwalla comes near the thematic excellence of Nissim Ezekiel. But, in few poems Daruwalla has even surpassed the poetic excellence of Nissim Ezekiel. Daruwalla’s poetry broadens the imaginative range of the reader with thematic universality with a multiple array of significance. Its import has deeper impact on the psyche of the connoisseurs of poetry. In the words of Sinha, “Daruwalla projects his understanding of the contemporary Indian reality with its multivalent contradictions” (10).

Daruwalla’s poetry is subtle and oblique and seems to follow the dictum of Tillyard,

“All poetry is oblique, there is no direct poetry” (65). His is the poetry of contemplation. Daruwalla’s naturalness goes with thoughtfulness is noted by several critics. Besides naturalism humanism is found in the poetry of Daruwalla. His poems are the reflection of abounding concern for humanism. His humanist attitude surpasses his other poetical qualities.

Daruwalla has been one of the most daring 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.

The influence of Ted Hughes as far as expression is concerned cannot be ignored. Partially his style has the similarities of Hughes’ animal depiction.

Hughes's work is marked by a mythical framework, using the lyric and dramatic monologue to illustrate intense subject matter. Animals appear frequently throughout his work as deity, metaphor, persona, and icon.
Perhaps the most famous of his subjects is "Crow," an amalgam of god, bird and man, whose existence seems pivotal to the knowledge of good and evil. In the same vein Daruwalla’s poems project the violent reality of human existence. But his works do not have any thing to do with other worldly forces. His works are rooted with human reality though the brute expression of animalistic tendency is present.

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.

Daruwalla 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 calibre 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 themes of his poem include deprivation, misery disease and death. His almost seem to contain Hardian attitude towards life. But in actuality his corpus of poem only presents the stark reality of Indian life. Though he could have been placed at the top level of Indian poetry the critics’ indifferent tendency towards Daruwalla has under stated his poetic excellence. The greatness of Daruwalla’s poetry is very much overshadowed by the critics’ unawareness of his sound poetic quality. However, his poetic genius is acknowledged by the Sahithya Akademi Award. Of late there is a surge in the interest among critics towards Keki N. Daruwalla. His impact on Indian poetry is tremendous.

His poems tends towards a prolixity and prosiness and he is praised for his bitter satiric tone which is exceptional in Indian verse.

Daruwalla’s first poetical collection published under the name of Under Orion in 1970, is a collection of thirty-three poems. In addition, the sequel volume, Apparition in April appeared in the next year. His next poetry collection, Crossing of Rivers, was published by Oxford University Press in 1976. His Winter Poems appeared in 1980. This poetry collection was written during the period of between 1974 and 1979. The is a collection of eleven poems, dealing with the various themes like hunger, death, misery, corruption in public life, and lovelessness. In a decade, he published four collections of poetry, which is a remarkable achievement in the field of Indian English Poetry.

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 in 1995, Night River in 2000 and The Map-
Most of the poems of Daruwalla borders on violence. Violence not only finds expression in his works but also it works at deeper levels in his poems. Violence is one of the dominant features in the poems of Daruwalla. Satish Kumar writes, “He brings alive the world of riots, curfews, warrants…”(202). Since he was an IPS officer his exposure to violence when compared to other poets is more enormous. In this light this paper deals with violence at various levels in the poem, “The Epileptic”.

The poem involves a family outing. A family of four goes out on a rickshaw—two children, a husband and a wife with a child on his womb. On the way the woman is suddenly affected by fits. Her body shivers. She loses her consciousness. The children move away rapidly from her. People rush for help. They come out with suggestions. A person even remarks that it comes in the cyclic form as that of menstrual cycle. The husband places a gag in between her teeth after forcing her mouth open. Then the traffic comes to a stop as if a mishap has occurred.

Later, she is taken to hospital. She is treated there. The physician uses several terms to describe her medical condition. He also prescribes medicine. The terms uttered by the physician put the husband in a state of shock.

The poem involves a minor incident but it conveys more on the psyche of the husband. Moreover, it also brings out the violence in its crude form. In this poem the violence works at various levels. The violence is psychological, sociological, physical, individual and lexical.

The husband suffers more violence right from the beginning to the end of the poem. He has to undergo several tortures even before reaching the hospital. After reaching the hospital his case is even worse as the physician bombards him with terms associated with her illness. Finally he is very much shocked and he trembles. The wife undergoes more physical trauma and also she faces embarrassment in the public. Her privacy is also invaded in the public. The violence affects the psyche of the family. Finally after regaining her awareness the wife’s trauma is more evident as her feature undergoes a sudden change expressing a sense of extraordinary disappointment. Her reaction is presented through the reaction of the husband, “As a limp awareness slouched along her face/ I found it was the husband who was shaking”. The incident affects the husband more. He has to undergo greater stress and trauma. The incident psychologically affects the whole family. The children plunge into a sense of insecurity. It incident also cast a spell of fear on the children. The entire family has been put to greater jeopardy as the privacy of the whole family is invaded in the public. Not only does it affect the family but also the person who carried them—the rickshaw puller. The invasion of the privacy is acute when one of the persons in the crowd referred to the menstrual cycle of the wife. It inflicts a psychological wound on the husband.

The curiosity of the mob has landed the family in trouble. People offering help to the person who suffers in the street is understandable. But the way in which they act only does a disservice. It is the response of the society to an incident which happens in the public. Rather than helping the family the act of the public seems to be more involved in the incident. The incident and its response only present the social disorder which encourages the invasion of the privacy in the public. It presents a lack of common sense among the public. The poem portrays a typical Indian scene where people rush to help the distressed one at the cost of one’s privacy.
The poem also presents the physical violence. The remedies her husband tries to put an end to his wife’s suffering cause physical violence on her:

The husband dug through the mound
that was her face; forced the mouth wide
plucked out the receding tongue
warped into a clotted wound
and a gag between her teeth. (10-14)

More physical violence is inflicted on the wife as a remedy to her suffering. It makes her state even worse. But the husband is restricted without much option. He is helpless. The violence gets accumulated till the poem reaches its climax. The violence is accumulated in the persona of the husband. All the aspects of violence in the poem are directed towards the husband.

Apart from the family the other person who is affected is the rickshaw-puller. He does not have any clue to act. The family got scattered. The children get out of rickshaw, the wife convulsing and the husband helping his wife. The rickshaw-puller feels a sense of guilt:

The rickshaw-puller was a study in guilt,
It was too much for him:
The convulsionary and her frightened kids
floundering about in a swarm of limbs. (5-9)

Another aspect of violence presented here is lexical. Words at times can cause panic. The husband after undergoing the trauma of the incident reaches the hospital. There physicians explain the state of health of the wife. While explaining more technical terms is used. It simply puts more pressure on the husband. It intensifies his stress:

The hospital doctors frowned with thought,
light words like petit mal were tied
to the heavies, ‘psychomotor epilepsy’.
A physician pointed out with pride
The ‘spike- and- wave’ electrical activity...(20-24)

So, violence works at various levels in the poem. To put violence into motion the poet uses the diction which is more conducive to enhance the intensity of the violence. He also uses coarser images to bring out the violence present in the society. The poem opens with the image of ‘severed wings’. The simile presented in the opening lines is more striking and it echoes the intensity of violence:

Suddenly the two children
flew from her side
like severed wings. (1-3)
The intensity of violence is further enhanced by the addition of two more lines, “Thank God, the burden in her belly/stayed where it was.” The violence is more acute as the person who suffers fits is a pregnant woman.

The beginning of the poem suggests immediacy. The beginning itself is sudden. Te beginning is violent not smooth or soft. The poet presents violence through violent diction and coarser images. It enhances the impact of violence in the poem on the readers.

The poem highlights the violent inherent in the Indian society.

Keki Daruwalla is a leading figure in Indian poetry in English today. He is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1984) and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1987) for Asia. Born in Lahore, Daruwalla holds a Masters degree from Punjab University, Chandigarh. He joined the Indian Police Service in 1958 (the recurrent theme of violence in his poetry has frequently, and somewhat reductively, been attributed to his choice of profession). He is retired and lives in Delhi.

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 in Indian Poetry- A perspective, applauded his work as “impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness”(31).

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 segue between metrical patterns and free verse, and a capacity to combine an epic canvas with a miniaturist’s eye for detail.

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?” (Collage II 46-49).

But it can also offer a fine-tuned vision of the particular, evident in his evocation of the rumbling innards of a miserable multitude listening to the speech of a corpulent political leader: “Within the empty belly/ the enzymes turn multi-lingual/ their speech vociferous/ simmering on stomach wall” (The People 14-17)

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”(The People 20-23) as well as rural and small-town India :Benaras is unforgettable evoked as the place where “corpse-fires and cooking-fires/ burn side by side” (Boat-ride Along the Ganga 48-50), even while the sacred river Ganga flows on, “dark as gangrene”).

His most recent book, Map-maker (2002), offers a compelling series of dramatic monologues by figures as diverse as a disciple of the Buddha and an old map-maker from Majorca, suggesting that the passionate interest in other cultural and historical milieux is alive and well. But there is also a more marked fascination with inner worlds, with philosophical notions of time and space. In Migrations, for example, the metaphysical is integrally linked to the concrete and the singular, as the poem explores the theme of migrations across space and time, from the violent biography of nations to a searing moment of personal biography: “Now my dreams ask me/ if I remember my mother/ and I’m not sure how I’ll handle that./ Migrating across years is also difficult.”

The poems presented here are a mix of recently published and unpublished work by the poet. Even while they represent a fragment of Daruwalla’s prodigious corpus, they offer some idea of the range and formal variety of his work.
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 Indo-English poet delves so deep into the mysterious inner world of the human psyche as does Daruwalla. Daruwalla writes with a vision, and the vision follows him like a shadow. While reading his poetry, the reader will have occasion to remember several poets. His attitude towards nature will remind one of Tennyson. His morbid preoccupation 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.

We can see Daruwalla’s worldview in his meditative poem Ruminations. The poet has glimpses of the true nature of life. He can see violence and hatred in the air. They are so omnipresent! Man cannot wash away these evils from his mind, try hard as he will! They stick deep. As violence and hatred reign all around, the natural corollary is death-wish. The poet says:

Death I am looking for that bald bone-head of yours! (5-6)

Flesh is man's ultimate destiny. Alas! it is a prey to corruption. Neither rose-water nor incense-sticks nor flowers can drown the smell of death.

The drift as it comes to us now is aroma/stench/nausea jostling each other (7-10)

Violence can disfigure the human body. The corpse of a woman lying on the verandah of the morgue, the victim of her husband's jealousy, has a grisly look, her nose being sliced off. Man is submissive to his ultimate fate.

bury him
and he is steadfast as the earth
Burn him and he will ride the flames
Throw him to the birds and he will surrender flesh like an ascetic. (12-16)

Can man ever have a cleansed feeling such as one gets while walking the temple after a river-bath? No, says the poet. Nature has a cleansed look after rain.

the hedge smiles
the leaf loses its coat of dust
the scum spills from the pool. (17-20)

Alas for man! He can never experience the cleansed feeling! Sin sticks so deep that sophisticated man is incapable of redemption.

I have misplaced it somewhere in the caverns of my past!

Daruwalla elaborates the theme of sin in his poem The Death of a Bird. The poem has the same motif as Dostoevsky’s novel Crime and Punishment. Man has to pay dearly for perpetrating sins on inoffensive animals and birds. The victim of the poet’s cruelty is a king monal that was engaged in love-making with his mate. The sinner and his female companion cannot get away with the sin. “Why did our footsteps drag?”

Depressed a bit we took the road
walking like ciphers disinterred
from some forgotten code. (Death of a Bird 25-27)

The consciousness of sin begets weird feelings and sensations. The terror that the sinner experience is more-than-life-size. The glazed eyes and throbbing heart of the dying monal fill the poet with terror and foreboding. Every incident after the perpetration of the sin however trivial has a nightmare horror. The pony’s cry as it fell into a gorge drowns even the roar of the river. The sinners are even incapable of enjoying love-making!

Death and nature’s cruelty, the two pet themes of Daruwalla, form the subject of “The Ghaghra in Spate”. The changing moods of the treacherous river are described using unconventional imagery. In the
afternoon the river is a grey smudge on the canvas. At night she is overstewed coffee:

At night she is a red weal
across the spine of the land. (9-10)

The river's relentless fury and man's unequal fight for survival are brought out in these lines:

If only voices could light lamps
If only limbs could turn to rafted bamboo! (28-29)

The people take their tragedy with stoic indifference.

They don't rave or curse
for they know the river's slang, her argot. (41-42)

What baffles the poet more is man's indifference to the tragedy that befell other human beings. It is time for celebration for some! Women come in chauffeur-driven cars to collect driftwood to decorate their drawing-rooms. Nature's orgy of destruction is not yet over. Fishes in the fields are strangled to death through an unholy alliance between the sun and mud.

This is the frightful picture of the Ghaghra painted by Daruwalla. The world depicted by Daruwalla is not a pleasing one. It is a sombre world where man is at the mercy of relentless elements. His poetry provides a unique experience for readers of Indian poetry in English. Daruwalla is indeed a star that dwells apart in the firmament of Indo-Anglian poetry.

Style and Substance

An eminent critic M.K. Naik has called Daruwalla, “one of the most substantial modern Indo – Anglian poets” (21) and this is a perfectly just estimate of Daruwalla’s poetic output. Daruwalla is certainly one of the major voices in Indo – Anglian poetry, even though not enough critical attention has been paid to his work. Naik further states:

It is rather surprising and disappointing that a poet of his calibre as a poet who has equalled Nissim Ezekiel’s achievement in the field of poetry even though his themes and his style are entirely different. (22).

Speaking of themes first, we find that Daruwalla’s poetry covers a wide range. We whole-heartedly accept the judgment of Vilas Sarang who has expressed the view, “Daruwalla stands out amongst Indian-English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit or scope of poets” (36)—incidentally this critic is the same who has found Daruwalla “to be guilty of the fault of prolixity” (9). This critic points out, and rightly so, that Daruwalla’s poetry has brought to life the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night, lathi blows on cowering bodies, “the starch on your khaki back,” soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the roof-tops, and press communiqués. Daruwalla’s favourite images, according to another critic, are those of violence, disease, and fire. Thus the first contribution which Daruwalla has made to Indo-Anglian poetry is his enlargement of its themes and his widening of its range of subjects.

Example comes to mind in quick succession. We may first of all take a brief look at the poems in which Daruwalla shows his social sympathy. Poems like “The Ghaghra in spate” and “Pestilence” stand out among such poems. The first-named poem brings before our minds the acute distress and misery of the villagers who have to starve for days because of the flood in the Ghaghra and whose mud-and-straw cottages are swept away by the rushing waters. When the flood-waters retreat, the damage caused is even greater. Then the Ghaghra becomes really bitchy. Pestilence depicts the misery and distress caused by an epidemic like cholera. Person affected by this disease are carried to hospitals on string-beds. There are frail bodies, frozen bodies, delirious bodies, and bodies lying supine on these beds. And yet the authorities do not admit that cholera has broken out in the city. They would give euphemistic names to this epidemic in order to reduce the horror in the minds of the people and to cover their own inefficiency. The doctors would say that there is a
piece among the poems entitled “Ruminations” in which the poet feels that there is violence in the very air, and that this violence is an indication of the mass hatreds which prevail in the country. The poet here employs some terrifying serpent-imagery to emphasize the dangerousness of these mass hatreds. The poem entitled “The Epileptic” also shows Daruwalla’s social sympathy and his compassion for the victims of disease.

Another important contribution which Daruwalla has made to Indo-Anglian poetry is his ironical and satirical treatment of certain social evils. Of course, poets like Nissim Ezekiel are also masters of the weapons of irony and satire; but our point is that Daruwalla too has made a contribution in this respect. The poem entitled Graft is a masterpiece of irony and satire. Not only have bribe-giving and bribe-taking been condemned in this poem but also the adulteration of foodstuffs and certain other malpractices. “To legalize a bastard you’ve to bribe the priest,” says Daruwalla. People indulge in all kinds of fishy deals; and even decent chaps indulge in adultery. But the stars, under which these people were born, indicate that they would have long lives and would flourish in every respect. The life-line of such persons extends to the elbow almost; and, as for children, each of the corrupt men would be blessed with nine! Then there is the poem entitled In the Tarai in which the poet says that bandits are of course everywhere and that their occupation is to burn the homes of the villagers, to cut off the fingers of women in order to obtain the gold rings which they are wearing, and to snatch away the gold necklaces from round their goitered necks. In describing these brutalities, Daruwalla uses his characteristic irony. 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. (1-2)

In this poem Daruwalla has given us a most interesting, satirical portrait of the behavior of the people, particularly towards their leaders. Collage I is another excellent satirical poem. Here Daruwalla ironically writes that the successive Indian governments have done a lot for the people: they have abolished zamindari (or landlordism), they have abolished drinking, they have abolished the use of a foreign language (English), and they have driven away the prosses (that is, prostitutes) from the G.B.Road. The last stanza of this poem is in Daruwalla’s finest of irony:

If we had plague
Camus-style
And doctors searched for the virus
There would be black-market in rats.

Imagery is another field in which Daruwalla has made a contribution to Indo-Anglian poetry. Like his themes, his imagery also covers a wide range. His imagery is neither fantastic nor commonplace. It is realistic and original, often strikingly original. And the imagery in his poetry is plentiful too. “The Ghaghra in Spate” is an outstanding example of Daruwalla’s realistic and original imagery. Here we are made to visualize the Ghaghra as looking like “overstewed coffee” and then at night like “a red weal across the spine of the land”. And the moon is red because she is having menses. The imagery in the opening stanza, we have the vivid and perfectly realistic imagery of the bandits working havoc in the land, setting fire to the cottages, wearing, and snatching away gold necklaces from their goitered necks. “Railroad Reveries” contains several vivid pictures, some of these unforgettable. There is a sad-eyed bitch which, being tormented by the urchins on the platform, walks away with her head drooping and her eyes bored. There is a blind boy on the platform, walking from compartment to compartment of the train with his begging bowl to whom the poet would like to give a coin in charity but is unable to do so because of his indecision. About Daruwalla’s imagery we have also to note that it is not superimposed upon a poem and that it is not gratuitous. The imagery in his poetry is integral to the
theme or it arises from the poet’s meditations upon a subject or from his thinking over a particular incident or
happening. We do not come across many examples of imagery for imagery’s sake in his poetry.

Daruwalla has contributed to Indo-Anglian poetry in another way also. His poetry is the poetry of
incident and event; and his mode is that of narration and description. As Vilas Sarang, points out, “even when
writing about nature, Daruwalla resorts to incident, as in Winter Poems which is about bees” (17). A poem
like “Monologue in the Chambal Valley” tells us interesting things about a bandit and an informer. But we do
not agree that Daruwalla’s poems tend to be longish and that they often have a lax appearance, characterized
by prolixity. It is true that he has written “longish” poems; but a number of poems, which are not longish but
are quite short, is also very large; and the element of incident, event, narration, and description in them
imparts to them and exceptional quality. And it is not only the story element in them which gives them
incident. The poem entitled “Routine” describes an incident (a confrontation between the police and a mob of
agitators); but it concludes with a welcome piece of instruction. We here learn that much of the police action
against a mob has been well rehearsed in the past, and that everything is done according to a plan. The poem
entitled “Death by Burial” contains interesting events and yet it concludes with a valuable moral which is that
a communal riot can break out over any issue even if there has been unanimity among both the Hindus and the
Muslims in most matters. The poem “Evangelical Eva” contains interesting material, and yet it too contains a
valuable piece of information about the essentials of human nature, namely that self-sacrifice and a life of
renunciation may not always be appreciated. “Pestilence” contains ample action. Cholera has broken out and
patients are being taken to a hospital in large numbers. But there is a point which the poet wishes to make; and
the point is that the authorities would not admit that cholera has broken out. Even the doctors in a hospital
would give to cholera another name, diarrhoea or gastro-enteritis. All this is something special about Daruwalla’s
poetry.

Daruwalla’s poetry abounds in figures of speech and, more particularly, in similes and metaphors
which are most often strikingly original. Once again we admit that all poetry contains similes and metaphors,
often in abundance, but it is the unusual kind of smile or metaphor which makes a greater impact on us. Thus
in “The Epileptic”, the two children of the afflicted woman fly from her side “like severed wings”, and the
thin edge of froth around her lips is compared to “foam-dregs left by a receding wave.” These are examples of
unusual similes. In “The Ghaghra in Spate” the river is described as being in the afternoon a “grey smudge”,
and at night as “overstewed coffee”. At night under a red moon in menses, the river looks like “a red weal
across the spine of the land”. Here we have most unusual metaphors. In one of the pieces in “Ruminations”,
the poet can smell violence in the air “like the lash of coming rain; and this feeling seems to the poet to be
“poised like a cobra”. These are original similes; and these are followed by a series of metaphors based on
serpent-behaviour. These are only a few of the examples. Actually Daruwalla’s poetry contains an abundance
of similes and metaphors.

We do not understand how a wrong view persists in the minds of even the highly educated people in
India that Indians should not write poetry in the English language. While it is true that the Indo-Anglian poet
does not have much proficiency in the use of metres, and that often he writes in free verse, yet his command
over the English language fully justifies him in using the English language as the medium of his poetry. Like
Nissim Ezekiel and several others, Daruwalla is a master of the English language. His diction is not of the
plain, commonplace kind. It is the diction used by a scholarly poet. We can even call his diction erudite. Not
only does he have an unusual capacity to combine words into striking phrases, but he has the capacity to
construct striking clauses. There is many a felicity of word and phrases in his poetry. “Half-cooked limbs/bore
witness to the fire’s debauchery,” he writes in Fire-Hymn. The use of the word “debauchery here shows some
daring on the poet’s part just as the earlier line “and wandering ghost –lights frightened passers-by” does. In
“Routine”, he conveys to us the range of the abusive terms employed by the agitating mob for the police in the
following words: “Their gamut ranges from mother to ‘sister-seducers’.” In the same poem, an officer by the
name of Karam Singh deplores the fact that youngsters should indulge in this kind of agitation and should
come into conflict with the police. And Karam Singh’s lament over this fact finds utterance in the following
words which, though somewhat indestructive, convey his idea most effectively:
I have children older than them,
These kids whose pubes have hardly sprouted. (17-18)

Of course, grammatically Karam Singh should have said: “I have children older than they,” but he is a policeman and is not expected to be conversant with the rules of grammar. In The Beggar, we have the following examples of the felicity of word, phrase, and sentence:

Maggots, moments, worms
Crawl like changing seasons.
He is a straw Buddha with sperm. (21-24)

While the charge of prolixity against Daruwalla may be true in the case of a number of poems, he yet provides enough evidence of his capacity to condense his material whenever necessary. The scene along the river Ganga could not have been depicted in a shorter compass than has been done in the poem “Vignette I”. This whole poem is written in lines each of which is strikingly short and yet vivid and adequate. Then we come across the following two lines which contain a striking simile and also convey the idea briefly and yet most effectively:

Beggars hoist their deformities
As boatmen hoist their sails. (27-28)

And the poem concludes with three lines which sum up the whole messages of the poem. The closing lines of “Collage I” are model of condensation. These lines read an epigram:

If we had plague
Camus-style,
And doctors searched for the virus
There would be black-market in rats. (45-48)

Coming to Daruwalla’s use of free verse. We find a large variety of rhythms which go to the making of his poems. It is true that non-metrical poetry does not meet our requirements or our expectations as readers of poetry. The use of free verse has become a fetish with the Indo-Anglian poets: and we deplore this trend. But as this mode of writing has become almost universal among the Indo-Anglian poets, we have got to accept it as an accomplished fact. And here again we find Daruwalla’s contribution to be substantial. No two of his poems are written in the same kind of free verse whether we look at them from the point of view of line-length or staza-formation or rhythm. The poem Graft is written in an entirely different kind of stanza and according to an entirely different rhythm by comparison with collage II (sub-titled “Mother”); and “The Ghaghra in Spate” is written differently from “Death of a Bird”. In this respect again Daruwalla is a master-craftsman.

Daruwalla’s concerns in his poetry are many. He has no pet themes. He has written poems on a wide range of subjects. He has a very broad outlook and, in his capacity as a police officer, has had many opportunities for observing life in India in almost all its manifestations. He has responded to almost everything that he has witnessed by writing a poem about it. That is why Vilas Sarang has said that Daruwalla stands out among Indian-English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience generally outside the ambit of poets. Daruwalla has put his experience of active life to good use in poems like “Curfew, In a Riot-Torn City”; poems from the Tarai; “Routine”, “Curfew 2” and “Walking to the Centre”. The same critic goes on to say that Daruwalla brings to life the world of riot and curfew, sirens, warrants, men nabbed at night,
lathi blows on cowering bodies, “the starch on your khaki back”, soda bottles and acid bulbs waiting on the roof-tops, and press communiqués. Daruwalla has portrayed the contemporary Indian socio-political world-not merely of the city, but also of the small town, of the village, and of the countryside-with heavy strokes, laden with savages irony. And this critic has quoted the following three lines from a poem entitled Notes to illustrate the irony:

No end to hoarding!

Breaking open the lockers they find

a briefcase full of rice. (17-19)

Mohit K. Ray has also noted the variety and range of the themes of Daruwalla’s poetry; and he mentions among those themes “the rioting mob, the tub-thumping politician, Evangelical Eva, Rotarian Renu, the Maulvi who dies of tongue cancer, the leper at the Taj, the ledge-walker, the epileptic woman, and the bandit chief” (496). Daruwalla’s favourite images, according to this critic, are those of violence, diseases and fire. The gun goes off on many pages of his poetry; the Taj is depicted as arthritic; and the river is depicted as being dark like gangrene. His attitude to fire is of course, a by-product of his parsi heritage.

There can be no doubt that Daruwalla’s interests are varied and that his observation is very keen and minute. But the most pleasing aspect of his treatment of his themes is that his attitude to the various problems and issues of life is always original, and that his poems are therefore by no means stale or stereotyped. The most remarkable of his poems are those which reflect his social concern and his compassion for the victims of misfortune. In this context the poems entitled The Ghaghra in Spate and Pestilence naturally occur to us immediately. In the first-named poem the havoc worked by the flood in the Ghaghra is the main theme, though not the only one. The point to note is that Daruwalla does not become sentimental here. He is not the tear-shedding type of writer; not does he try to draw tears from the reader’s eyes. He shows a remarkable restraint and an attitude of detachment in depicting the horror of the flood as “half a street goes churning in the river-belly”, and the thatched cottages just melt away in the flood-waters. A buffalo floats over to the rooftop where men have taken shelter. Much has been left by Daruwalla to our own imagination. He only throws hints to indicate the misery and the suffering, and can even write a word or two to lighten our sense of suffering by saying that children have enough spirit in them to cheer the rescued boats.

In Pestilence Daruwalla depicts the misery caused by an epidemic like cholera. Numerous persons are being carried to hospitals because they have caught this dreadful disease. There are brown shoulders, black shoulders, and shoulders round like orbs; and there are frail bodies, delirious bodies, some bodies absolutely without any strength or energy, lying supine, transfixed under the sun. But there is an irony in Daruwalla’s treatment of the subject. The authorities would not admit that an epidemic has broken out in the city. Even the doctors in the hospitals would deny this fact which is evident even to the lay public. The doctors ask: “who says they have cholera?” and they themselves reply: “They are down with diarrhea,” or they reply: “It is gastro-enteritis.” A piece from the poem entitled Rumination also shows Daruwalla’s social sympathy. He finds that there is violence in the very air, and that this violence is an indication of the mass hatreds drifting across the moon and hovering, poised like a cobra. He looks for a fang that darts, a hood that sways, and eyes that throw out a reptile hate. Here we have horrifying serpent-imagery to indicate the kind of hatred which burns in human breasts and drives them to fight one another. So many people die in the violence that mortuaries are filled with corpses which begin to decompose and emit a foul smell which cannot be drowned by any amount of rose-water, incense-sticks, and flowers. The poem entitled The Epileptic too shows Daruwalla’s social sympathy and his compassion for victims of disease. A woman gets a sudden fit of epilepsy when she is going somewhere by a rickshaw in the company of her husband and her children. The rickshaw-puller experiences a sense of guilt; and the inquisitive crowd around the unconscious woman fan her, rub her feet, and try other ways to summon her back to her back to her senses. The husband is a picture of
distress and fear. The woman herself is neither hysterical nor raving. Only her head is jerking from side to side. When she is taken to the hospital, the doctors frown and use technical terminology to describe the woman’s ailment. After going through this poem most of us would lose our own mental equilibrium for a time. Actually the same would be our reaction to all the poems which have been analyzed above.

The poem Graft reflects another of Daruwalla’s concerns in the writing of his poetry. Daruwalla wrote this poem many years ago; but the nation has awakened to the evil of corruption only now when some leading personalities of the political world have come into the picture. Daruwalla has here written a biting satire on the prevalence of bribe-giving and bribe-taking, and the widespread malpractices in business. Oils are adulterated, medicinal tablets made of chalk are manufactured; infected meat and stale fish are openly sold. Sawdust is mixed with jute in order to add to the profits of the manufacturers. And Daruwalla puts it graphically and aphoristically in the following lines: “the right buck at the right time tips the scales.” But the matter does not end there. A bastard can be declared as a legitimate issue by the priest if he is given enough money as a bribe. In other words, even the priesthood has been infected by this disease of corruption. And Daruwalla has stated the whole thing in his own inimitable style.

The social concern of Daruwalla appears also in the poem entitled The Beggar. Here again Daruwalla’s attitude is one of detachment. He does not preach a sermon or point a moral. He merely depicts the misery of the beggar who just sits there, while time wheels round him like a kite, and “maggots, moments, worms crawl like changing seasons”. This poem too deals with a socially emotive theme because beggary is a widespread social evil in this country; and fifty years after the attainment of freedom by this country this evil has increased manifold.

Daruwalla’s social sympathy appears in Vignette I too. Along the banks of the river Ganga, lepers sit huddled. The Ganga flows through the land, not to lighten the misery but show it. All long the river –banks, beggars hoist their deformities in the same way as boatmen hoist their sails; and the poet adds: “ The Ganga flows through the land, not to lighten the misery but to show it”.

Each of these poems deals with some social evils or the other, and deals with it in an ironical and satirical manner, using language which is as sharp as an axe. Daruwalla’s poetry is the poetry of social reform; but the evils have taken such deep roots that Daruwalla’s axe has made no dents anywhere.

Evangelical Eva depicts the spirit of self-sacrifice. Eva has left her own country in order to serve the hapless children who have no guardian to look after them. But her spirit of self-sacrifice has not been appreciated. Instead of being encouraged in her work, she is sternly rebuked by a man from her own country and discouraged from continuing her work by an elderly man of the very village which she is trying to serve. Such is the irony of the situation here.

In the poem entitled The People, Daruwalla depicts his view of the people in general as being fickle-minded and having no principles by which to judge their leaders. They are capable of condemning a leader for having said something which he had previously also said but for which the people had previously praised him. The people do not really understand much of what the leaders say to them. In the poem entitled Death by Burial, Daruwalla first depicts the population of a village as being united in their attitude of opposition and hostility towards smugglers and decoits but then becoming divided over how to kill the decoits whom they have been able to capture and who had been inflicting many atrocities on the villagers. The Muslims in the village population would like to bury the captured decoits alive, while the Hindus of the village would like to kill them by setting fire to them. This communal divide is a perfectly realistic view of the Indian people. This basic division between the Hindus and the Muslims is a serious progress which the country could otherwise have made. But it is noteworthy that Daruwalla himself does not draw any moral from the incident which he has described in the poem. He allows the readers to draw the moral themselves. His own attitude is one of detachment. But it is quite clear what he thinks about the whole thing. He describes the division between the Hindus and the Muslims as an intervention by Providence. The riot caused by the communal divide is
attribute by Daruwalla to Providence! And here lies the irony of the comment on the situation. *The Revolt of the Salt Salves* has a most unusual theme. The revolt referred to here is a matter of the remote past because there are no longer any slaves in the literal sense in any part of the world. But the poem has not lost its validity even now because the exploitation and the persecution of certain categories of people by the land-owning and property-owning rich people is still going on in many countries; and revolts by the exploited and persecuted people are also a matter of frequent occurrence. Another poem which deserves attention from the point of view of its theme is *College I*. Here Daruwalla speaks ironically about the continuing malpractices and social evils in our country. Daruwalla here mocks at the claims of our leaders that they have abolished “zamindari” (that is, landlordism), drinking, and the English language, and that, furthermore, they have driven away the prostitutes from the areas in which they used to ply their trade. What Daruwalla really means to say here is that the propertied classes have become even richer and more powerful than ever before, and that the poor have become poorer, relatively speaking. The abolition of drinking (or “Prohibition” as it is called) is more of a joke and a farce than any solid achievement because smuggling of liquor and the manufacture of spurious liquor have grown by leaps and bounds. And as far prostitutes, it has spread to numerous areas in every big city instead of remaining confined to the particular localities where previously the prostitutes used to carry on their business legally. The last four lines of this poem are particularly pungent in their irony. Here Daruwalla says that, if plague were to break out in the country and if the medical men needed rats to perform their experiments in order to discover some anti-plague vaccine, rats would begin to be sold in the black market. Here Daruwalla is at his ironic best. He has succinctly summed up the Indian character.

Nor does this complete the list of the themes with which Daruwalla has dealt in his poetry. There are poems which deal with entirely different subjects. There are two long poems, *Dialogues with a Third Voice* and *Under Orion*, which deal with different subjects. These poems debunk certain myths. Then there is a poem entitled *Food and Words, words and Food* which depicts the squalor and the poverty in this country. There is a poem entitled *To Gandhi*: it depicts the ridiculous distortions which accompany our deification of national heroes. There are the three poems entitled *Charity: Three Faces*, a reference to which has already been made. The volume of poems entitled “Crossing of Rivers” contains several excellent poems. The central metaphor in this volume of poems is the Ganges with all its primal, religious, and emotive connotations. The rhythm of this river is that of life and death, of birth and rebirth, of passion and rejection. Unfortunately the function of this river is not to lighten the misery of the people but show it. (Three lines of this poem have already been quoted above). In short, the thematic range of Daruwalla’s poetry is enormous. We do not agree with the critic who has accused Daruwalla of prolixity. Daruwalla may have repeated certain ideas; but he knows the art of condensation also.

Imagery is one of the strongest points of the poetry of Daruwalla. Actually, imagery is an important feature of the poetry of every poet because it is imagery which enriches a poem and extends the range of a poem. Of course, in one sense imagery is something incidental; but, in another sense, imagery is basic to a poem provided it is not something superimposed upon it but something arising from the theme itself and something integral to the theme. Daruwalla is a master of the art of building up imagery; and he does not have to work hard to find the imagery for his poems. Imagery flows from his pen even as ideas and words flow from it. His imagery is most original, in fact startlingly so. There is nothing stale or stereotyped about it. This imagery is drawn directly from first-hand observation or from a perception of some extraordinary aspects of real life. While reality provides the ground-work for this imagery, it is the poet’s imagination which supplies the imagery. Imagery is a product of the poetic imagination working on an incident or a happening or an occurrence. Daruwalla’s imagery is neither fantastic nor common place. It is most often unusual or odd or out of the ordinary. Indeed, we marvel at the way in which he is able to give us a piece of description through a series of pictures. Most often his imagery is realistic and concrete but sometimes it is abstract and intangible. Whatever the kind of imagery which we find in his poems, it arises from his thoughts about the subject on which he is writing. There is nothing artificial or redundant about his imagery. This imagery
strengthens and reinforces the impact of his ideas, and it is not something extraneous to the theme. Legitimate imagery in poetry is that which is inseparable from the ideas and the feelings which have prompted the poem.

Stark realism is the chief quality of much of the imagery in Daruwalla’s poetry. An outstanding example of this sort of thing is to be found in the poem *The Ghaghra in Spate*. Here is a poem based strictly on the writer’s actual observations. But every poet, who writes a poem on this subject, would not offer the same kind of imagery because every poet observes things from his own angle. And so in this poem we have the picture of the Ghaghra looking like “overtewed coffee”, and looking at night like a red weal across the spine of the land. And the moon is red because she is having menses! When the flood comes into this rive suddenly at night, it is like a nightmare for the people who have to undergo days of hunger and have to find shelter on the roof-tops though many of the mud-and-straw houses have already collapsed. When the flood-waters recede, the Ghaghra turns actually “bitchy”; and it is then that the real catastrophe overtakes the people. Behind the retreating flood-waters, the land sinks and houses bend down on their knees as if paying their farewell respects to the retreating waters. The paddy fields, which were filled with water and fish, would now begin to dry up, bringing an end to the life of the fish.

Another poem which is also based upon actual observation and is, therefore, wholly realistic is *In the Tarai*. Here a whole region has been brought to life through the imagery which the poet has built up. Hog-deer, elephant-grass, and malaria have gone; but the cattle-fairs are being held, and townships are coming up and becoming thickly populated. The earth seems to be in ferment, and the air is full of the hum of insect-dialects. This is followed by the imagery of the bandits working havoc in the land, setting fire to the cottages, chopping off women’s fingers in order to get the gold rings which they are wearing, and snatching away gold necklaces from the goitered necks of the women. The poem ends with a brief picture of the district town which has an ice factory and even a *dhobi*.

*Railroad Reveries* is a psychological poem but even here we come across some concrete and realistic pictures belonging to the external world. There is a girl huddling into herself, searching for the warmth which is not there. Arthritic fingers are holding a tea-tumbler tightly in their grip. There is a sad-eyed bitch standing upon the platform; but, feeling fed up with the misbehavior of the urchins, she walks away, with her head drooping and her eyes bored. And then there is a blind boy with his begging bowl to whom the poet would like to give a coin in charity but is unable to do so because the boy has already moved on to the next compartment of the train. all these pictures impart a solidity to the poem which is actually intended to reveal to us the thoughts passing through the mind of the passenger. His last thought, for instance, is that he would have to share his berth with a bed-bug and a greasy doubt. In this poem we find a fusion of the physical reality outside and the inner reality of the mind. The poet gives us his mental or emotional reaction to each of the external sights which he witnesses and depicts.

*The Revolt of the Salt Slaves* is remarkable because of the imagery which it offers to us. This imagery is most unusual; and we may even find it difficult to visualize it because we have never seen salt-mines or the kind of work which is done by the labourers there. The image in the opening stanza is a striking one. Here we witness a striking contrast between the black colour of the slaves and the slave-drivers on one hand, and the white colour of the sunlight and the rocks of salt on the other hand. Then there is an equally vivid picture of the slave-drivers lashing the backs of the slaves who do not seem to them to be working as hard as they should. Next comes the picture of the revolt when at least for a few hours the slaves would enjoy a sense of triumph. This was the land of salt and iron, says the poet; and the slave-drivers lay “impaled” on earth. In this poem we have brutality – the brutality of the slave-drivers and the brutality of the slaves. Accompanying this two-fold brutality is the hardness and the inflexibility of rock and iron, not to mention the whip which speaks in syllables of fire, meaning that the lashes administered by the whip are acutely painful.

Another poem remarkable from the point of view of imagery is *The Epileptic*. Here again we have an example of unusual but authentic imagery. We have heard about epileptics having sudden fits of epilepsy; but not many of us have actually witnessed such an occurrence in a street. This poem depicts the victim of an
epileptic fit, but it also depicts the rickshaw-puller who is experiencing a sense of guilt, the husband who is trying his best to help the woman, the inquisitive crowd of people who have gathered round the unfortunate woman, and the strictly professional attitude of the doctors. Thus we have a series of pictures; and all the pictures together build up a wonderful, though painful, poem. This poem too is starkly realistic, without any exaggeration or any under-statement. How true is the following picture, for instance!

They fanned her, rubbed her feet, and looked around for other ways to summon back her senses.

There is equally realistic and authentic imagery in the poem entitled Crossing of Rivers. Here much of the imagery is presented through the use of metaphors. For instance, the river “coughs” and “eddies” and “converses with the mud”. The waters are placid, and “glassed with green moss”. Then there is a picture of a young man jumping into the water and finding himself in great danger. The young man’s head is rising about the surface of the water, then sinking below it, alternately, till a fisher-girl comes to his rescue. Here too we have imagery which is charged with emotion.

Other poems by Daruwalla also contain ample evidence of his capacity to supplement the appeal of his poems with suitable imagery which is relevant to the theme. It seems that Daruwalla does not have to exert himself to seek the right kind of imagery but that imagery comes as naturally to him as words for the building up of that imagery. In the poem entitled Routine we have a most vivid picture of how an incident of the kind, which had occurred ordered his men to load their guns, and then he loaded his own gun also. This proceeding has been well rehearsed, the speaker in the poem informs us. Then the police officer pointed his barrel into the air. Death of a Bird contains elaborate imagery. There is the imagery of the mass of clouds piled on the crags, and then of a pony losing its balance and falling down a thousand feet below into the roaring river. Then we have the audio-imagery in a passage which describes the jungle-sounds coming supposedly from jackals, wolves, and bears. Next, there is the imagery of a fire being lit with turf and peat to provide some warmth to the woman who is accompanying the hunter. Almost every passage in this poem contains a vivid picture which at the same time advances the action. A piece in the poem Rumination is another example. Here the speaker can smell hovers brooding, poised like a cobra. Here the two similes are themselves vivid and realistic pictures. Then there is the foul smell coming from the morgue. Nothing can drown this smell—neither rose-water, nor incense-sticks, nor flowers. Then we have some reflective lines which have a visual appeal also. If a human being is buried, he would prove to be as steadfast as the earth itself. If his body is cremated, he would ride the flames. If he is thrown to the birds, he would surrender his flesh to them like an ascetic. Finally, rain comes down noisily like a blinding sheet to smile, the leaf looks refreshed, and the scum spills over from the pool. Unfortunately, however, the poet does not experience that “cleansed feeling” which he desperately needed. The poem entitled Pestilence is most remarkable so far as its imagery is concerned. Here again the whole poem is a series of images but as an example we may confine our attention to the lines which bring before us the pictures of frail bodies, frozen bodies, delirious bodies, but not henna-smeared bodies of brides. Some of these bodies have been drained completely of energy; some seem to be moving a bit; and others lie supine transfixed under the sun.

Range of His Poems

The poem “Epilepsy” describes a fit of epilepsy which a woman suddenly got as she was going in a rickshaw with her children and her husband. When the fit overtook her, her children, feeling panicky, quickly jumped down from the rickshaw and fled in different directions in a state of terror. Fortunately the child which the woman carried in her womb remained where it was.

The rickshaw – puller, thinking that he was, in some mysterious way, responsible for what had happened to the woman, began to experience a sense of guilt. He could hardly bear to see the frightened children of the woman because he was not aware of the fact that the woman was given to such fits of epilepsy. The husband too was feeling terrified at this moment. He tried to do whatever he could do to help her under
the circumstances. For instance, he forced open the woman’s closed mouth, and he put a gag between her teeth so that the mouth should not get closed again.

The traffic on the road came to a halt because of what had happened. Everybody was curious to know the nature of the mishap. Some of the people fanned the woman; some rubbed her feet; and some tried other methods to bring her back to her senses. A pedestrian said in a whisper that the woman’s fits occurred during the days of her menses.

The Woman was not hysterical. She only looked red in the face, and she seemed to be absent-minded. Her head shook from side to side like that of a puppet. Some froth hovered round her lips. She was then taken to a hospital where some of the doctors spoke lightly of her ailment while others used some difficult medical language to explain her malady. These doctors described her trouble as the spike-and-wave electrical activity, and prescribed belladonna and paraldehyde. But just as one of the doctors expressed the view that she was not doing well, she recovered. Her very suffering seemed to have cured her. And just when she seemed to recover her senses, it was the husband who was now trembling with anxiety and fear.

In “The Ghagra in Spate” a flood comes into the river Ghaghra every year. The flood comes without any prior notice. In the afternoon, the river may look just like a heap of mud; in the evening it looks black like over-boiled coffee; and at night, when the moon looks red, the river is like a wound caused by the lash of a whip. Going along the river-bank in the growing darkness of the evening, one would never think that a flood is about to come. The landscape looks perfectly smooth and tranquil. Kingfishers and gulls may be seen on the river-bank as usual.

Then Suddenly at night the food arrives. It hardly takes twenty minutes for the waters in the river to rise to a high level, causing panic among the people living close-by. There are no lamps to light the way for people wanting to flee to safe places; and there are no boats, not even makeshift ones, to carry them to safety from the flooded river. The water of the flooded cottages, and forcing the cottagers to take shelter on the rooftops which are still intact. The men find themselves in a precarious position on the rooftops. A buffalo gets drowned, and its dead body rises to the surface of the water. It takes three days for the flood to subside; and ruing these three days the men on the rooftops remain hungry, while those of the cattle, which are still alive, have not been milked during this time.

Rescue boats arrive to take the people to safety and to provide them with food. The children are cheerful enough (because they do not comprehend the danger which they have been facing. Then men do not indulge in curses or in any crazy kind of talk because they are familiar with the behaviour of this river. They do, not even pray to God for help because they know that the prayers in this situation are futile. Camps have been set up to distribute food among the villagers, while ten miles away from the scene of destruction peasants go about catching fish from the flooded rice-fields while women in chauffeur-driven cars come from the city to take a look at what the flood had done to the village people, and to witness the stuff which the river-water had deposited on the land nearby.

The real damage, which the river does, becomes evident only after the flood has subsided and the water had retreated. The land, where the flood waters had stayed for a number of days, begins to sink; the houses in the village, which had withstood the fury of the flood, are now seen almost on the verge of collapse; and the rice-fields, into which the flood-water had brought plenty of fish, now begin to dry up and the fish begin to die. The fish are killed by mud and the heat of the sun.

“Fire Hymn” centres round two incidents, each of which led the poet to form a certain resolve. The first incident occurred when the poet was yet a boy. Walking along the river-bank in the company their dead, the boy saw the red-bot embers still glowing, many hours after a dead body had been cremated. But what attracted the father’s attention was the half-burnt fingers of the dead body. Pointing to those half-burnt
fingers, the father told the boy that sometimes the fire failed to perform its task fully and that, as a consequence, some limb or portion of a limb remained only half-burnt.

On seeing those half-burnt fingers to which his attention had been drawn by his father the boy felt somewhat depressed. As a Parsi and a follower of Zoroaster, the boy felt pained by the thought that the fire, of which he was a worshipper because of his Parsi religion, sometimes failed to perform its function fully. Clenching his fist, he swore that he would never again allow the fire to commit the sin of forgetting its function.

The poem deviates from the prescribed Parsi ritual subsequently the poet never again came across any case of the fire having failed to consume a dead body fully. In the meanwhile he had grown up into a man and had got married. Twenty years had passed since his father had drawn his own first-born child was dead. According to the Parsi custom, the dead body should have been exposed on a raised structure known as the Tower of Silence to be eaten up by birds of prey; but the nearest such place was about a thousand miles away. The poet was therefore compelled to to have his child cremated. When the dead body was consigned to the fire, the poet heard the fire telling him that he was forgiven for having committed a sin by violating the Parsi code. In other words, the fire forgave the poet for not exposing the dead child to the vultures. But the poet could not forgive himself for having deviated from the Parsi code of conduct; and he therefore felt that the fire had this time committed another sin. Now its sin was that it had forgiven him for his violation of the Parsi code. What the poet means to say is that, even if the Tower of Silence was situated a thousand miles away, he should have carried out the Parsi ritual instead of having adopted an alternative method of disposing of the dead child.

The title of, “Routine” shows that the incident described here is one of a routine nature, with nothing extraordinary or exceptional about it. The poem describes a confrontation between a platoon of policemen and a large crowd of agitators. The policemen wore putties which made them feel that their legs were burning. The helmets, which they wore on their heads, made them feel that their brains were on fire. As soon as the policemen arrived at the place, where the crowd had gathered to agitate and to indulge in violence, some of the members of the crowd standing along the way moved backwards; but this movement was no indication of their being peaceful citizens. From them came words of abuse which, however, the policemen ignored because they were accustomed to all kinds of filthy abuse from a crowd of agitators bent upon violence.

One of the senior policemen, who walked side by side with his boss (probably the police superintendent), expressed his total disgust with the agitators who were all young men in their teens. This policemen, by the name of Karam Singh, said that even his children were older than these agitators who had not yet attained the age of puberty. The young agitators were ready to set fire to the tram-cars but they would have been equally happy if they could burn the policemen themselves. As for the policemen, they already had a feeling that their legs, covered with putties, were on fire.

What actually happened had fully been expected. The happening was merely a routine affair. Such an incident had taken place many times before, and it had, therefore, been well rehearsed. As the mob did not disperse, the police officer ordered his men to load their guns, and they obeyed. He then pointed his own gun at the crowd, and ordered the policemen to fire. As he had fired his gun into the crowd, one of the men in the mob was hit and fell down dead. The policemen, as on past such occasions, had fired only into the air.

The Salvage Squad then arrived and took the dead body to the mortuary for purposes of the usual post-mortem examination. This Squad also took away the tram-car which had been burnt by the mob. Eventually the officer and his men marched back to their headquarters. In the evening one of the leaders of the agitators said on the radio that they were marching forward and would continue to march till they achieved their aim.
“Death of a Bird” describes a hunting expedition. The narrator of the story is the hunter himself; and he had a female companion with him. When the man and the woman entered the forest, it so happened that a male bird and a female bird were engaged in a sexual act, and their manner of mating was fierce and violent. The birds attacked each other with their claws, and they screamed even as they continued with their act of love-making. The female bird seemed timid and, therefore, something of a nonentity, while the male bird was aggressive and fierce, and seemed to be the master of the situation. The male bird was, in fact, the king. The man, who carried a gun, took aim to the male bird and fired. The bird fell down to the ground, almost dead though not actually dead because its heart was still throbbing. The man and his companion picked up the dying bird and deposited it into a bag which they were carrying for the purpose. The female bird, though not hit, was badly frightened and, feeling terrified and uttering cries, flew away from the crag where the pair had been engaged in the act of love-making.

The man and the woman walked on, after having killed the bird and having thus committed what could be regarded as a sin. The sky was being covered by mist, and the hunters somehow felt their footsteps slowing down. Clouds were gathering on the crags. As their pony was also walking slowly, the man and the woman gave it a push to quicken its pace. But the pony lost its balance and fell down into a gorge a thousand feet below where a river flowed, making a loud noise as it flowed.

The pony screamed in pain as it fell down into the river; and, while it was killed by the fall, its scream had climbed up to where the man and his companion stood in a state of horror at the accident which had taken place. The man and the woman resumed their journey though they were now feeling very depressed.

Evening had now fallen, and the wayfarers were overtaken by darkness. There were bears in the forest, and there were jackals too. The man fired his gun at the bears and the thick growth behind which he thought bears lurked, waiting to attack them. But he missed the aim each time. When the jackals howled, the woman asked if they were wolves. But the man made no reply and simply took her hand in his and walked on towards a cave which was enclosed by pine trees and where there was less danger. They might not have been able to find this cave if they had not seen a growling dog which had been left behind by the resin-tapers to guard their cans containing the resin already collected by them. Nearby they saw more and more of mist spreading and thickening.

As the woman was now feeling very cold, the man lighted a fire, using dry grass and the dry dung of animals. He also rubbed her sides and feet in order to warm her. Their limbs came into a close contact, but for some reason they inwardly felt somewhat apprehensive.

Then they got ready to shoot one more bird, their last. Neither of them had at this time any sense of guilt because they thought that neither the scream of the pony, nor the death of a bird, nor the prowling bears at whom bullets had been fired, represented any sinful acts committed by them. Both were at this time guilt-free.

The woman was now resting her head upon the man’s chest. With her hair held tightly by him in his hand, she fell asleep. The night was advancing towards its climax. The moon made its appearance for an hour or two. The wings of the dead bird looked dark. The wolves seem to have vanished; and so did the mist. The man and the woman would have continued to dream of peace and of love if a wind had not begun to blow. The wind seemed to cause a great disturbance in the night. The loud sound of the wind could be compared to the loud moaning of a witch in pain.

The man broke his gun into two towards the dawn. A brown-coloured bird rose from the crags, flying with force and, as it passed over the heads of the man and the woman, it shrieked with fear and fell down to the ground, dead. It fell at the feet of the man and the woman; and the woman said that this bird was the mate of the one which they had shot at the very outset. She expressed the view that now a curse would
overtake them. She pointed to the eyes of the dead bird (or perhaps the dying bird) to indicate that its eyes were still terror-stricken.

The poet has a feeling that some kind of violence is going to take place. The violence would be caused by the mutual hatred which prevails between two different groups of people. The poet goes about looking for the places where this violence might break out. Violence would lead to killings; and the poet looks for the possible places where death might raise its head.

“Ruminations” is a study of communal tension resulting in violence and suffering. The poet has an apprehension of the outbreak of violence, caused by mutual hatred and lack of tolerance and understanding between two communal groups in the future. The poet then speaks about the mortuary where the persons killed in violence would be taken and kept for post-mortem or for identification by the relatives who would naturally like to take away those dead bodies in order to bury them or cremate them as the case might be. If kept in a mortuary even for a few days, a dead body begins to stink because of the decomposition which takes place. Not even the sweet-smelling substances like rose-water and flowers can drown that foul smell. There is, in the mortuary, the dead body of a woman whose husband had cut off her nose on a suspicion of her having adulterous relations with another man. After having cut off her nose he had even stabbed her in her breast, thus puncturing her lungs.

Man, says the poet, can adjust himself to different conditions. For instance, a dead man, if buried in the earth, remains there firmly. If the same man were to be cremated, he would allow the fire to consume him quickly. If the dead body were thrown to the birds (like the vultures and the kites), he would let his flesh be eaten up without any delay.

When the rain comes, it transforms everything, giving a fresh look to the trees, plants, and the hedge, and washing away all the dust which lay upon them. The poet too waits to be freshened by the rain. He waits for a feeling that he too has been “cleansed”. However, he waits for that feeling in vain because it never comes to him. It seems that this feeling used to come to him only in the past, and that it would never come to him again.

This poem describes a situation in which a drowning man is rescued by a fisher-girl. There are times when the current of a river is very brisk and swift; and there are times when the flow of the water is so slow that one cannot even judge in which direction the river is flowing. But whatever the season, a river has always to be crossed. Sometimes a man may cross a river on foot because the water is hardly waist-deep or because the surface of the water is almost in contact with the mud at the bottom. Sometimes the current of water is so tranquil that it hardly seems to be moving and you have to ask the boatman which way the current of water is going.

“Crossing of Rivers” is about a young man rescued by a fisher-girl. There are occasions when young blood seeks excitement and adventure. On such an occasion a young man may jump into the river and, if he finds it difficult to swim, he may catch hold of the tail of a fat-bodied buffalo to keep himself afloat. If a fisher-girl happens to see this man struggling to keep himself afloat, she would scream in order to attract somebody else’s attention to his predicament. She may see his head alternatively rising above the surface of the water and sinking below it like a coconut. The fisher-girl may then quickly swim towards him and give him a push towards the river-bank. By this time a group of people may have gathered on the river-bank in response to the alarm which had been raised by the fisher-girl. The fisher-girl would then ask the crowd to move back a few steps so as to let the rescued man breathe properly. She would fan his face in order to make some more oxygen available to him. She may even wipe off the froth from his mouth. And, when he opens his eyes and looks into the distance, he may not even be able to see the rock from which he had taken the plunge into the river. (He has, in any case, crossed the river all right even though he had been on the verge of drowning). This poem describes a situation in which a man faces a danger though the danger is ultimately averted by the initiative taken by a fisher-girl. The poetry of Daruwalla has been described as the poetry of action and
incident. In this poem we have both incident and action. The first one-third of this short poem is just an introduction to the main situation which forms the substance of the poem. Then the incident happens. A young fellow, seeking excitement, jumps into the river to prove his mettle. However, he finds himself in grave danger because he cannot cope with the fast current of the water. He would have been drowned if it had not been for the initiative taken by a fisher-girl who had, by a sheer chance, caught notice of his head bobbing up and down in the water like a coconut.

Daruwalla wrote a poem on English language. Here is an interesting poem about the English language as it has developed in India. Daruwalla has evidently written this poem because of a common feeling among the well-educated Indians that the Indian poets should not write poetry through the medium of the English language because it is a foreign language and because true poetry can be written only in one’s native language. In fact, there has been a regular controversy and a heated debate among the English-knowing people in India regarding the suitability of the English language as a medium for the writing of poetry by the Indians. Fortunately, English is now well-established in this country as a medium for the writing poetry by the Indians; and this kind of poetry has come to be known as “Indo_Anglian” poetry, with the writers of this kind of poetry being known as “Indo-Anglian” poets. Daruwalls is himself an Indo-Anglian poet; and he has here written a satirical poem with regard to the language which he himself employs in the writing of his poems. And he is surely one of the leading Indo-Anglian poets.

Daruwalls jokingly assigns to the English language as spoken and as written in this country the label “my mistress”; and he says that his mistress comes from a family in which the blood of several races and religions has mingled, and to which babus and professors of English have also made their contributions – “One-Night Contributions”, as he puts it.

His mistress, says Daruwalls, can easily be recognized by the way in which she speaks her consonants. She speaks the consonants (as distinguished from the vowels) in such a manner that he feels as if she had given him a severe blow. Her jargon and her latest slang are available in dictionaries; and she speaks as if she had tried to sob but been prevented from doing so by some impediment in her throat. In the mornings her mouth feels sour because of the dreams which had been brewing (or taking shape) in her head during the night. His love for her survives from night to night even though he has to toil hard to continue loving her. People recognize her even in the streets; and they hiss at her in disapproval at the way she behaves.

Despite all this, his mistress, Daruwalla goes on to say, is a showy type of person who wears cheap but gaudy jewellery. She wears imitation jewellery, and she wears high heels even though her feet are covered with henna up to the ankles. As for food, she does not stick to the ordinary, common dish which is made from potatoes. She is westernized in her tastes, and asks for roasted meat and grilled pomfrets. She makes no reference at all to the intoxicating drink which her father used to extract from cashew-nuts. She is not Angelo-Indian, says Daruwalla. If the Demellos were to come to know about her, they would deal with him very severely. She is not Goan, nor a Christian from Syria. She is Indian English, which is the language that Daruwalla himself makes use of.

The Kind 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 good 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.
The king directs the scribe not to fail to describe the sorrows caused by military victories and the misfortunes which result from the enslavement of the conquered people. In every land there live people of all classes. Every class and every caste carves out its own path and cannot be made to change its ways. The scribe must not only describe the destruction and the slaughter which have taken place but also the separations of people from those whom they loved or who loved them.

The king speaks to the scribe in a mood of great sorrow. He says that he is almost on the verge of despair. He has now completely given up his pride and has adopted humility as his guiding principle. He would therefore urge the tribals to desist from crime and from violence. He would call upon the tribals to cooperate with him and to join him in his efforts to establish friendly relations and to maintain peace in the country.

Finally, the King asks the scribe to write down these things on some hard and imperishable stone; and he also asks him to write the whole thing in simple language so that even the backward and illiterate people living in the jungles may be able to understand it. The people have become very poor so that they do not have enough fuel even to cremate their dead; and there are homes where people have no fuel even for the purpose of cooking food. The scribe must write in a style which can reach the minds of the people and touch their hearts.

We have here a sombre, grim poem with plenty of moralizing. If we read it in the right mood, we would feel uplifted by it. There is a certain nobility about the King’s words; and his message cannot fail to go home to our hearts. The pity of it is that many such words are spoken by moralists after every great catastrophe, and then forgotten soon afterwards. There have been great massacres; but the world has not ceased to kill and destroy. The conquest of Alexander The Great, the French Revolution, the two World Wars (in the Second of which nuclear bombs were used), the Russian Revolution came promptly to our minds at the mention of bloodshed and slaughter. And even today much bloodshed is taking place. Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, and several African countries are going through the misery of civil wars and, in the midst of all this destruction, the voices of sanity such as the King’s in this poem are simply ignored. In any case, we have here a great poem in this sense that it raises certain basic issues with which mankind has always been faced, and which it has never been able to solve. Actually this poem has the force and eloquence of a great sermon.

“The Unrest of Desire” is psychological. A strong desire makes a man somewhat uneasy. He may try to keep his desire hidden in his heart but it would manifest itself in some way through the expression in his eyes. The nature of his desire would not, of course, become known to anybody; but the fact that there is a desire in a man’s heart would definitely become known to others who happen to see him and the expression in his eyes. A man may wear a mask or may throw some sort of disguise over the expression of his face, but he would not be able to mask the expression in his eyes.

A man may put his heart’s desire under some heavy weight like that of a slab of cement or a large heap of bones, but his eyes would betray the fact that there is a desire in his heart. A man keep his mouth shut, but the desire in his heart would somehow escape his heart and enter his eyes and thus become visible. A man may adopt any other methods which may occur to him to disguise the state of his heart, but it would still show itself in his eyes. A man may draw all sorts of pictures with a piece of charcoal on the walls of a cave in order to give a false representation of his desire; but it would never quit his heart and would even haunt him in his dreams.

This is a poem with a strong psychological interest. It describes a man’s incapacity to suppress a desire or to keep it hidden under some assumed expression on his face. A desire would never fail to manifest itself through the expression in a man’s eyes. Of course anybody looking at such a man may not be able to understand or guess the nature of his desire, but he would definitely come to know that there is a desire in his
This fact would become known to him by his merely looking into the eyes of the man concerned. The eyes would provide some sort of evidence of the existence of a desire in the man’s heart.

The idea expressed in this poem is an abstract one; but much concrete imagery has been used in the poem. Eyes manifesting the unrest of desire; a mask being thrust upon a face; the salt-blood being probed with an insistent tongue; a desire being pressed down with the weight of cement slabs or coils of bones; bison and stag being traced on a wall with charcoal – all these are concrete pictures to build up which the poet has used metaphorical language.

“Death by Burial” deals with a crime and judgement. For the past one month a batch of ruffians and evil-doers had been going stealthily into, and coming stealthily out of, the grove in which a faqir lived. The faqir was generally referred to as the “Baba”; and those men used to smoke ganja in the grove which they used as their hiding-place because smoking ganja was forbidden.

Nobody took any notice of this kind of illegal activity which consisted in smuggling a forbidden drug and smoking it. But then lawlessness took a more serious shape. Bandits or decoits attacked the village. Some of them raped a village elder’s daughter-in-law. Some snatched away the ear-rings of the women, thus not only taking away the ornaments but also wounding the women concerned. Some of them tortured an old woman in order to know from her where the cash of the family lay hidden, so that she had no choice but to tell them that the cash was hidden in the haystack (meaning a pile of dry grass or straw which is thatched on the top and on the sides for protection against storm and rain). The baba was not harmed in the least because he was, after all, a Baba and he was, besides, maintaining a silence-fast at that time. (It is quite possible that the Baba himself was a member of the gang of the drug-smugglers and that he only served as a sort of camouflage for the actual smugglers and ganja-smokers. In any case these bandits did not think it necessary to do any harm to him).

Two months later, the bandits made another attack on the village. There was a big outcry from the villagers. It so happened that the bandits had only one pistol, and this pistol too was a country-made one and, therefore, not very dependable. When the bandit having the pistol in his hand fired at the villagers to scare them away, the pistol did not function at all, with the result that the villagers were able to overpower the bandits and to capture them.

The bandits were a group of persons belonging to various occupations and trades. There was a Kalwar who manufactured country liquor. There was a cobbler. There was a Singhi who claimed that he could cure people’s wounds by sucking a little of their blood. There was a Manihar who made bangles from lac. There was a sweeper who earned his living by carrying away unclaimed dead bodies in his bullock-cart.

The villagers dealt with the bandits very severely. They first gave the evil-doers a sound thrashing. They rained lathi-blows on the backs of those men in order to teach them a lesson. But they did not stop there. They made up their minds to put an end to their lives.

The villagers put the bandits into gunny-sacks alive, and sewed the mouths of the sacks. Then they got ready to put their prisoners to death. But now arose a dispute. There were Hindus among the villagers, and there were Muslims among them too. Actually, half of them were Hindus and the other half were Muslims. The Hindus declared that the prisoners would be buried in the earth in their sacks. The argument on both sides became heated and developed into a regular fight. In fact, a communal riot broke out in the village.

We may imagine, of course, that in the violence which followed, the prisoners must have made good their escape, leaving the villagers to settle the matter in their own way.

This poem depicts the evil of bribery which is rampant in this country today, and which has now gone far beyond the dimensions which it had in the days when Daruwalla wrote this poem. Daruwalla begins this
poem with a brief picture of a court official who sits outside the court premises to draft documents requiring a magistrate’s attestation to acquire a legal validity. The narrator in this poem who may be Daruwalla himself or somebody else knowing the procedures by means of which illegal documents may be turned into legal ones. There are all sorts of methods event o change the very facts of a case by re-writing them and having them attested by a magistrate through his clerk whom the magistrate has necessarily to trust. The narrator says that he has to take out some money from his pocket in order to hand it over to the notary or the scribe who is to draft a particular document and then have it attested by the competent authority. The notary or scribe in this poem is evidently a bribe-taker, though he may not be given to any other bad habits. He may not be a habitual drinker; he may not have any desire to seduce women who want any false documents; and he may not be a gambler. He may even be a handsome, polite family-man whose wife thinks that he works overtime in order to make some extra money for her and the children.

Dishonesty takes many forms, says the narrator in this poem. A dishonest man may adulterate oils; he may make tablets of chalk and sell them as medicinal tablets to cure certain diseases; he may sell meat which has already become infected and, therefore, dangerous; he may sell stale and stinking fish. That is not all. If a priest is given enough bribe, he would perform some sort of virtual in order to declare even the child of an illicit sexual union as a perfectly legitimate child. The priest may even perform a marriage ceremony between a non-Jew with the daughter of a Jewish priest. And the pity of it all is that it is not only the bad-looking fellows who indulge in such corrupt practices; corrupt practices prevail among even those who would normally perform good deeds such as stopping their cars in order to stop a fight going on between a couple of youngsters. There are people considerate enough not to insist on having a sexual intercourse with wives who are not well enough for the purpose. Even such decent chaps do not shrink from adopting dishonest and corrupt methods to achieve their ends.

A dishonest transaction is not the only form of corruption. A man may have a certain dignity about him; and he may create a favourable impression by his looks and his demeanour. But he may actually be a corrupt fellow, willing to accept a bribe to carry out a foul task in order to benefit the bribe giver. The bribe-takers are men without any conscience. They do not feel deterred by the fear of consequences. Their destiny is, in their opinion, already inscribed on the lines of their palms which indicate their long lives and the large number of children which they would beget. Saturn and Jupiter seem to be favourable towards them, and the mere acceptance of bribes by them would not alter their destiny which seems to be favourable to them in every conceivable way.

This poem contains a satirical description of a well-known region of this country. The prominent features of this region have been pinpointed and emphasized in such a way that the region acquires an identify of its own, a character of its own, and even a personality of its own. Of course, the region is not here in anyway glorified or even eulogized. The poem is permeated by a lot of irony which amuses us by indirectly drawing our attention to the unpleasant features and the seamy side of the region.

The hog-deer, the elephant-grass, and malaria in the kidneys have all disappeared from this region. Cattle-fairs are held in mango-groves; and small towns are not only coming into existence but also becoming over-populated, with insanitary conditions beginning to prevail. It seems that the earth in this region is in a state of morbid excitement and that the scenery here is becoming more and more dissatisfied with itself. The hum of insects is becoming louder and louder, thus indicating that the insect-population is on the increase. The roads, or what passes for roads, have become uneven and rough so that the motor vehicles skid as they run. Termites are clearly visible in the light shed by the headlights of the motor-cars or motor-trucks.

This is a region in which there is no scarcity of bandits who go about robbing women of their ornaments. The bandits are devoid of all mercy and would not mind cutting off a woman’s finger in order to remove a gold-ring from it if the gold ring cannot easily be pulled off. As most of the women are suffering from gout or elephantiasis (which makes the limbs swell to extraordinary proportions), it is really difficult to
remove the rings without cutting off the fingers. Similarly it is difficult to remove a gold necklace from a woman’s neck when she is suffering from goitre. Robberies are indeed the order of the day.

The district of Tarai is not altogether bad. It has its bright side. If you are traveling by car and have to cross the river Ghaghra, the ferry would take both you and the car across the river. The town of Tarai has an ice factory so that you can be sure of getting cold water to drink. There is even a washerman available in the official guest-house where you may have to stay. However, it would not be desirable for you to have your bush-shirts starched because the starch will not remain on the bush-shirts long enough. The bush-shirts would soon become limp, losing all their stiffness. They would also begin to give out a bad smell like which comes from an Insemination Centre.

The persons sleeping in the room next to yours would think you to be a conceited or haughty type of man. They would think you to be haughty not because you drink beer or play squash but because they would see you sleeping naked under a ceiling fan. They have a notion that you cannot make love if you have smeared your body with odomos to keep away the mosquitoes. Being accustomed to mosquito-bites, they expect you also the adjust yourself to the situation.

The signs of modernity are clearly visible. Ravi Shankar is a great musician in the older tradition but he is now surrounded by the modernist followers of the kind of dancing known as “rock and roll”. The traditional forms of spiritual meditation may not have yet been discarded completely but the disciples of Maharishi Mahesh, the founder of transcendental meditation, are growing in numbers. And then, of course, there are the followers of the kind of singing, accompanied by frantic gesticulation, brought into fashion by the group of singers who came to be known as the Beatles. However, all these so-called modernists do not represent any real advance in the field of dancing and music. On the contrary, these idiots can learn a lot from tradition. The feeling of exultation and frenzy, which they display is very similar to that which was evinced by the Indian people when the Nobel Prize for literature was conferred upon Rabindranath Tagore.

After having made these satirical references to the notions of modernity which have gained currency, Daruwalla says that he feels simply overwhelmed by the kind of fervour displayed by some of the newly established organizations like the ones who find great significance in the Bhagawad Gita (one of the sacred books of the Hindus) and the message of peace which it has to deliver to its followers. He feels much impressed also by the new cult of the westerners who have started wearing the Indian garment known as the “dhoti” and who spend much time in producing the loud sounds which are caused by the clashing of cymbals and invoking sacred name of the Cow (which is worshiped by the Hindus and the sacred name of Krishna (who is regarded by the Hindus as an incarnation of God). In the same breath the poet invokes hemp which is habitually smoked by the Hindu sadhus and ascetics to keep themselves in a state of intoxication.

The poet goes on to say, in the same satirical vein, that the Indians have undoubtedly achieved a good deal during this phase of their development. They have abolished zamindari or landlordism by reducing to the minimum the land which any one land-owner may possess. They have passed laws proclaiming prohibition as one of their basic policies; and they have done away with the English language as the medium of their administrative work and as the medium of all their official communications. They have even passed laws to abolish prostitution, thus driving the prostitutes out of their business without providing them with any alternative mode of earning their livelihood.

These are not the only achievements of the Indian people since the attainment of freedom. They also perform such generous acts as releasing a considerable number of prisoners- men who had been put behind the bars for having committed robberies and rapes – on the occasion of the Republic Day as a mark of their national rejoicing. They have even promised to reduce the jail sentences of such anti-social elements as pimps, homosexuals, and the writers of poetry.
A move has also been made towards the establishment of electric crematoriums where unclaimed
death bodies can be cremated. This is a commendable move comparable to the opening of a new sewer which
could suitably have been named as “the sewer of hope”. It is also possible that some day the sun would refuse
to shed its light to show the way to the lepers. After all, India is a great country in which a man’s left hand is
regarded as unholy because it is used (by the Hindus) to wash their bottoms (after they have visited the toilet).

India is a great country in other ways also. Here a distinction is made between the destiny of an
individual and the destiny of the nation as a whole. Here a horoscope to foretell the future course of the life
on an individual is prepared soon after the birth of a child. However, this horoscope tells only half the truth
because it foretells the destiny of only the individual and remains silent so far as the destiny of the nation is
concerned. A constant rise in prices and a frequent increase in taxes are among the chronic features of the life
of the nation as a whole; but such disastrous possibilities find no mention at all in the horoscope of the
individuals. India is a country so corrupt that, if plague were to break out here in an epidemic form, and if
medical researchers needed live rats in order to make experiments with the object of finding an anti-plague
serum, the rats would begin to be sold at high prices in the black market. (Plague breaks out among human
beings after it has first broken out among the rats; and so the rats would be needed by the medical researchers
to perform experiments in an effort to find a remedy against plague).

“The People” depicts the author’s disillusionment with his country. “Mother” here stands for the
Motherland; and, after a preliminary confession that he had lost his nerve and his confidence in himself and in
his country, Daruwalla describes his encounter with his mother (Meaning his motherland which is personified
here).

From the third stanza onwards, Daruwalla speaks to his motherland as if she could listen to him and
take notice of what he feels about his country. He says that the face of his mother (or Motherland) resembled
a shattered mirror in which he could not see his face. In other words, the poet felt that he had lost his identity
as an Indian. Unfortunately the rains had failed in his country, and people had begun to starve on account of
the shortage of food. Starvation reduced many people to skeletons so that their armlets could not stay where
they should have stayed on their arms.

The poet then says that the sorry state of affairs in the country had made the motherland so unhappy
that she had been shedding tears. To the poet, the motherland looks like a floating foetus lying on a bed
infested with larvae (or germs of all kinds). All flesh is subject to corruption; and the flesh of even the living human beings in this country has begun to decompose so that it has begun to smell of decay and corruption.
The mother (or the motherland) can see all this but she only smiles; and there is nothing but blankness or
idiocy in that smile. The mother has lost that magic recipe by means of which she used to keep herself happy
by keeping her sons and children happy. The mother is today no better than an empty slogan walking through
an empty street, with the walls tarred with slogans. In other words, there is a lot of slogan-shouting in the
country but no constructive work being done.

The poet then says that he would like to lose his vision rather than witness the mother, bruised and
wounded, dragging herself to the holy city of Benares to die. In other words, the poet would rather become
blind than see his country going to the dogs and degrading itself. Finally, the poet says that he has no need to
read the pessimistic philosophy of Kafka or to read such depressing works as T.S. Eliot’s poem, The Waste
Land when he can see his humbled and humiliated mother before him. The mother (meaning the country)
presents a huge and vast spectacle of frustration, desolation, and despair.

Daruwalla is, on the whole, a pessimistic poet; and Collage II: Mother is one of his most pessimistic
poems. This poem depicts India as a country in which poverty, ill-health, starvation, and defeatism prevail on
a large scale, and in which no constructive work is being done. The country has failed to register any
improvement or to make any progress on the economic front. The spectacle of this country reminds him of
such pessimistic foreign writers as Sartre, Kafka, and T.S. Eliot. We certainly agree with Daruwalla’s
analysis of the situation in this country. Daruwalla has shown a lot of courage in thus exposing the weakness and shortcomings of his country. Besides, the language which he has used to describe the situation in this country is very forceful and emphatic. Indeed, he has gone to the extreme in using similes and metaphors which describe the sad state of affairs in this country.

Conclusion

Keki N. Daruwalla’s poetry contributed in a significant way for the growth of Indian Poetry in English. He almost outsmarts most of the Indian poets. The exceptions may be one or two. Ezekiel may come close to Daruwalla. Even at times he could outwit Daruwalla.

The study has found that the poetic of Daruwalla is unmatched. Nissim Ezekiel’s contributions to Indian Writing in English especially, verse is remarkable. He had enriched Indian Poetry in English through his range and craftsmanship. He poems have thrived to bring the under current of Indian life. His corpus of poems has echoed the Indian spirit and its sensibility. His poems are deeply rooted in Indian idiom. As an individual he would oppose anything which he considers defames Indian ethos. As an individual he was against certain vested interests of Western origin which demeaned Indian life deliberately for political reasons. At the same time he is not against any sincere portrayal of Indian reality. The poetry of A. K. Ramanujan not only reflects the Indian ethos but also it is capable of presenting various themes in a condensed and expansive form. His poem has the inner layers or hidden layers of meaning. His poems are unusual and they present the stark reality of human existence. Another aspect of his poem is intertextuality. Most of his poems have links to each other. His poems are very much influenced by Tamil poetries. A. K. Ramanujan’s poems are the quintessence of modern Indian poetry in English. The poetry of Dom Moraes is not limited to narrow socio cultural realms. His poems are rooted in his individualistic emotions and concerns. His works are preoccupied with a sense of despair. His images are expressions are sharp. In the words of Michael Schmidt, he is a “poet and writer who rejected narrow cultural identity” (31). His poems are not rooted in any cultural milieu but rooted in his emotional and psychological impact caused by his personal traits. His poems are catholic in spirit though based on his emotional travails and at the same time his poems are not self praising or self centred. It goes beyond his self. Unlike A. K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes is a monoglot. He wrote only in English. Mahapatra’s poetic world is filled with personal pain, guilt, remorse, hunger, desire and moments of renewal, his environment is filled with symbols of beliefs by the ordinary lives of the people of Cuttack the temples, the Hindu festivals and the monuments. The poems are varied attempts to bridge an epistemological, phenomenological gap to know, to be part of, to enclose and to experience with the world and other whether it is a woman, temple stone or a Hindu priest. Kamala Das’s poetry is marked for the essence of eroticism. Her exploration of women’s needs is in fact an attention to eroticism. Das makes no attempt to hide the sensuality of the human form. Her work seems to celebrate the joyous potential of sex while acknowledging its concurrent dangers. As a confessional poet Kamala Das’s art is rooted in the feminine sensibility and sensuality. The poem of R. Parthasarathy was born very much out of frustration and despair. His poem is modern in its sensibility and expression. In a way the predicament of modern man is visible in the works of Parthasarathy. His works are sensitive towards racial prejudice. The conflict in him is presented through some of his poems.

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.