



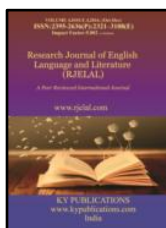
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## POST – INDEPENDENT INDIAN SOCIETY AS PORTRAYED IN THE POEMS OF KEKI N. DARUWALLA

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### ABSTRACT

With the attainment of Independence from the British rule in 1947, India placed its first step towards shaping its progress. India starts emerging as one of the powerful nations in the world. Post Independent India can be seen as an amalgamation of both the dark and the bright sides. While some writers are busy in portraying the positive, bright side of the Indian society, Daruwalla critically highlights the dark and negative aspects of it. As he himself is a police official, he confronts violence, bloodshed, riot, murder, social evils, etc., right before his eyes and he records his official experiences in his poems. By portraying sick India with sick people using weapons like satire and irony, Daruwalla succeeds in bringing awareness in the minds of the people. This paper aims to analyse how Daruwalla critically depicts Post-Independent Indian society in his poems.

**Keywords:** Post – Independent India, corruption, social evils, poverty, satire

Indian English Literature is a little more than hundred and fifty years old. The British people gave rise to “a new climate of thought and purpose” (Iyengar 37) in the Indian soil. Indian English Poetry has won international distinction and fame. Tracing its growth, it can be divided as Pre-Independent and Post-Independent poetry. The early pioneers like Derozio, Ghose and others, though they were mostly imitative, they paved the way for the later significant Pre-Independent poets like Tagore and Sarojini Naidu. India’s Independence did not only bring a change in the social, economic and political fields but also in the field of Literature. The Post-Independent poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Keki N. Daruwalla, R.Parthasarathy, A.K.Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra were very much influenced by writers like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound that their poetry is highly modern. They no longer based their poetry merely on the theme of love and nature. The daring presentation of the contemporary society, the complications of human relationships, alienation, East – West identity, the problems of

women, etc., also form the themes of their poems. Keki N. Daruwalla is one of the experts in depicting the contemporary Post-Independent Indian society.

Daruwalla views the Post-Independent India as a society full of chaos, anarchy, bloodshed, corruption, poverty, unemployment and the long cherished moral and ethical decline. Daruwalla’s search for new hopes and values in the degraded modern India is revealed in many of his poems. “The poet, as a moralist, is trying to open our eyes to the tragedy around” (Inamdar 3). He criticizes many unchecked social evils – poverty, violence, hunger, corruption, black markets and the insatiable lust for power of the politicians in his poems. Satire and irony are the weapons with which Daruwalla exposes the follies and weaknesses of the society around him. All the established sections of Indian society – academicians, pseudo-Gandhians, politicians, priests, bureaucrats and the common people are vehemently criticized by him.

As an Indian poet, Daruwalla has chosen only Indian subject matter and so Indian landscape forms the

background of his poems. A very clear picture of Indian society is seen clearly as he deals with various customs, religions, rites, rituals, seasons, gods and goddesses, in his poems. Many of his poems center round in Indian places like the Ganga, Varanasi, Rishikesh, the Chambal valley, the Tarai, Bombay and many other Indian villages. In addition to these, the ancient Hindu mythologies and legends surcharged with typical Indian words and phrases like 'mantra', 'gayatri', 'pinddan' and 'panchtirath' occupy his poetry. Moreover, here and there, he makes references to the superstitious beliefs of the people in India. The river in flood, the area infected with malarial mosquitoes, the Indian landscape filled with beggars, crowded population, criminals, anti-social practitioners and the river banks occupied by the dead, the diseased and the beggars are the scenes that can be witnessed in his poems.

Varanasi and the river Ganga, the holy places of the Hindus form natural settings for many of his poems. The Hindus associate these places to Godliness and consider them as abode of God. They believe that these places have the power to wash away all their sins and redeem mankind. But, the river, during its long journey from the hilly regions of Himalayas to the dusty plains of Varanasi, is completely polluted. The purity, the sanctity and the sacredness of the river is spoiled by the people and as a result, it becomes sewage. The banks of the river become an asylum for people like beggars, lepers and dwarfs. The mortal remains of the dead are thrown into the holy water.

Women do not take off their saris

As they enter the water;

Men leave their clothes behind.

The dead leave their bodies.

(CR 18)

Either side of the river presents an ugly sight of disease, staleness, lifelessness, squalor and poverty. The river is so polluted that in "Boat-ride along the Ganga", the poet says;

Dante would have been confused here.

Where would he place this city

In Paradise or Purgatory, or lower down

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The concept of the goddess baffles you –

Ganga as mother, daughter, bride.

What plane of destiny have I arrived at

Where corpse-fires and cooking-fires

Burn side by side?

(CR 12)

The holiest of the river becomes the unholy one due to pollution and over population in India. So, in the hands of the poet, the Ganga and Varanasi become symbols to express the filth and poverty of modern India.

India is a land of divergent castes and creeds. In spite of its seeming unity, a spark of light is enough to create a huge fire of communal riot in the minds of the people. Even for petty and silly reasons, people indulge in a riot. This fact forms the theme of "Death by Burial". Here, the village people, with much difficulty, capture a gang of ruffians who caused a series of crimes in the village. When they decide to put the prisoners to death, there arose a dispute among them :

half the village could be Hindu, half Muslim,

Enough cause for a riot,

With half the village shouting

'death by fire!'

and the other half

'death by burial!'

(UO 84)

The argument on both sides become heated and it ends in violence. Thus, communal riot can take place in India at any time without any proper and significant motive.

The institutionalized corruption and bribery at all levels – government offices, private centers and even in individuals – find forceful expression in the poem, "Graft". Corruption has penetrated so deep into the Indian soil in all its levels that they are almost ineradicable. In the poem "Graft", Daruwalla says that in order to become corrupt, a man need not be a drunkard or a gambler or a womanizer. He may be a decent man and can do all sorts of social malpractices.

He doesn't have to wear a gargoyle grin

he may not be given to liquor, females, betting.

He is handsome, suave and a family man;

his wife thinks this is overtime he is getting.

(UO 18)

The priests are also infected by this disease of corruption. "To legalize a bastard you've to bribe the priest" (UO 81). People in India are so corrupted and money minded that if an epidemic plague were to break out in this country and if the medical authorities and researchers needed live rats to do experiments in order to find an anti-plague vaccine, then the rats would be sold at high prices in the market place.

India is a politically independent country. But it is corrupted by the politicians themselves. Fallen from its high pedestal, politics has been degenerated into the art of money-making. It is very difficult to find a true, loyal, sincere and corrupt free politician. The hypocrisy of the politicians is pointed out in the poem, "Paradise". While people suffer out of poverty, the politicians enjoy themselves in a five-star hotel in the company of scotch, woman and blue-film. "Paradise, of course, is the Skylark Room / in a five-star hotel" (WP 31). The sole concern of the politicians is how to grab the power. They are least bothered about the sufferings of the poor.

India is a democratic country and it is defined as a government of the people, by the people and for the people. But the people are fickle minded in nature and their leaders are hypocritical. It is depicted in the poem, "The People". Here the poet says that people are not competent enough to select their own leader. They are unintelligent and devoid of the capacity to think and incapable of comprehending the views expressed by the leader. Daruwalla says, "Between their raillery and applause/ I found no difference" (AA 20). During the course of the leader's speech, the people never pay attention to him. They eat groundnut and keep gossiping about him. The leader's words fall on the ground instead of their ears.

they ignored him off the stage,  
scratching their hairy bellies  
whispering snide gossip,  
while his words fell on the floor unheard  
amongst shelled ground-nut  
(AA 20)

The same man who has been glorified as Prometheus on the previous day has been decried by them. His words which they consider worthless

today would impress them greatly that very night itself. People are easily flattered and cheated.

Beggary is a widespread evil in India. After Independence, this evil has increased manifold. The sight of a beggar is common everywhere in India. The filth, squalor, dirt and unhygienic atmosphere that surround a beggar is brought into focus in the poem, "The Beggar". While describing the beggar, the poet says, the beggar is a "grey stone" because he rooted himself to the place where he sits. He is suffering from chronic wounds which attract the flies. The common people and the government are indifferent towards him. He sits in the same place polluting the entire atmosphere around him. His death is insignificant. After his death, his place will simply be replaced by another beggar equally ill-seeming.

"Collage II: Mother" is a terrible picture of India. While describing his own motherland, the poet says that the mother is like "a floating foetus on a larval bed" (UO 55). The face of his mother is like a shattered and cracked mirror in which he could not see his face. He finds that the mother is shedding tears because she is unhappy with the sorry state of affairs. She is infected with larvae – all kinds of corruption and so the flesh has begun to decay and emit a foul smell. The poet addresses her saying:

Corruption is the chemistry of flesh.  
No wonder the senses suppurate, passions  
putrefy.  
But you survey it all  
with a smile pasted on your lips  
inanities pasted on the smile.  
(UO 56)

The mother is bruised and wounded of corruption and so she drags herself to the holy city of Banaras to die. The sight of this country reminds the readers of the pessimistic foreign writers like Sartre, Kafka and T.S.Eliot. So, in order to know the darker side of life, one need not read the depressing poems of Kafka and T.S.Eliot. Daruwalla's own picture of motherland is enough to get a vast spectacle of despair, frustration and disappointment. The mother symbolizes the young India which finds it difficult to exist in the exploited and extorted world. Gandhiji is the father of the Independent India. But Gandhi is remembered only once in a year by many

Indians and Gandhism has been little understood in contemporary India. It is portrayed in "Gandhi on the Eve of his Centenary" as;

So M.K. Gandhi  
Don't accuse us of forgetfulness  
Once a year  
We always remember you  
For on *Gandhi Jayanti*  
The butchers shut up shop  
And we go without mutton  
(AA 55)

Daruwalla's poems show his pessimistic view of the powerful denunciation of India that is deteriorating rather than improving. Nissim Ezekiel rightly says, "such a bitter, scornful, satiric tone has never been heard before in Indo-Anglian poetry" (68). Daruwalla's love for the country is revealed when he expresses his dissatisfaction with the disastrous society. He is a patriot as his aim is to bring some improvements in the plight of the people. In fact, all such social drawbacks are not confined to any single nation or society. They are all international phenomena as the entire world breeds cruelty, violence and immorality. In this way, Daruwalla's poetry attains universal significance.

#### List of Abbreviations:

- UO- *Under Orion* by Keki N. Daruwalla  
AA- *Apparition in April* by Keki N. Daruwalla  
CR- *Crossing of Rivers* by Keki N. Daruwalla  
WP- *Winter Poems* by Keki N. Daruwalla

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