

Keki N. Daruwalla's Craftsmanship

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Abstract

A great poet shows equal attention to both the matter and the manner of saying things. Daruwalla, one of the greatest modern Indian poets writing in English, is not only admired for his thematic significance but also for his great literary and stylistic success. Of his depth of feeling and imagery, his command over the English language, his use of figures of speech, his manipulation of condensing and compressing his materials, his use of free verse, rhyme and rhythm, Daruwalla, a conscious craftsman commands respect. His poems are noted for their precise way of expression, accuracy of details and freshness of facts. This paper brings into focus how Daruwalla uses different poetic devices in his poems in order to emphasize his various themes concerning society in the minds of the readers.

Keywords: craftsmanship, imagery, personification, irony

Craftsmanship is the manner in which a writer conveys his ideas. Daruwalla, a leading Indian English poet in English Literature is noted for his wonderful craftsmanship. He deserves great attention as he uses strikingly unconventional style. To give pictorial qualities, he uses imagery and irony and to elaborate his ideas, he uses smiles and metaphors. Turning the raw materials that he gathered from his own life and especially from his profession as a police officer into a fine poetry, rich with stylistic features is not an easy task. But it becomes very easy in the hands of Daruwalla.

Daruwalla's art of condensing and distilling the facts into a fine compact poetry proves him to be a master. With the minimum possible number of words, he can depict a great event which will create a powerful emotional effect on the readers. In "Death by Burial", the Baba's dubious role is mentioned with the words, "silence-fast" (UO 83). The

capture of the burglars, the catalogue of them, the thrashing given to them are all described economically without any waste of words. He has the capacity to condense his material whenever necessary. The closing lines of “Collage I” illustrate his art of condensation.

If we had plague

Camus – style

And doctors searched for the virus

there would be black-market in rats.

(UO 54)

These lines which read like an epigram sum up the whole message of the poem. Likewise, in “The Ghaghara in Spate”, while describing the three stages of river- before, during and after flood, by avoiding lengthy descriptions, the poet succeeds in evoking the required response from the readers. Within a few lines, the poet is able to present a beautiful picture of a calm river, flooded river and the receding river.

Daruwalla’s poetry is remarkable for its naturalness and spontaneity. Just like a fountain, poetry comes freely from his hands without any obstruction. The brilliant impersonal descriptive ability imparts value to his poems. For example, in “The Ghaghra in Spate”, the poet describes a disastrous situation in an impersonal and objective manner and yet succeeds in arousing the sympathy of the readers. Like the picture taken by a camera man from various angles, the river is described scene by scene.

Both thematically and stylistically, Daruwalla’s poems are remarkable for its modernity. The contemporary modern Indian society forms main theme in his poetry. Stylistically,

Daruwalla often adopts a modern idiom to cater to modern man in a language of his own, and not in the language of dreams and escapes as we witness in the English Romantic poets, nor in that of poetic inversions of Toru Dutt, nor in that of saccharine – sweetness of Sarojini Naidu, nor in that of Miltonic pomposity of Sri Aurobindo, nor in that of preponderant mystical broodings of Rabindranath Tagore.

(Dwivedi 170)

To suit the taste of modern man, he uses fresh, current and powerful phrases. His style is also free from the ancient conventions and restrictions.

Daruwalla makes use of the figure of speech, personification, very well in many of his poems. The distortion and disfiguration of the English language by the Indians in their day-to-day life is mocked at by Daruwalla by making a personification of Indian English as a woman of loose morals.

In the streets she is known.
They hiss when she passes.
Despite this she is vain,
flashes her bangles and her tinsel;
wears heels even though her feet
are smeared up to the ankles with henna.

(UO 22)

The poet personifies the English language so skilfully that it seems as if he is portraying a woman. Only in the last line, he mentions that the woman he describes is none but the English language that he uses. Similarly, in “The Ghaghra in Spate”, while describing the river before flood, Daruwalla says,

In the afternoon she is a grey smudge
Exploring a grey canvas
When dusk reaches her
Through an overhang of cloud
She is overstewed coffee

(UO 78)

This silent river, when suddenly becomes violent, the poet says, “And through the village / the ghaghra steers her course” (UO 79). When it recedes, the poet gives the personality of a cruel, ill-tempered, destructive, mad and bitchy woman fleeing with widespread arms, taking with her whatever comes in her way.

She flees from the scene of her own havoc

Arms akimbo, thrashing with pain

Behind her the land sinks

Houses sag on to their knees

In a farewell obeisance.

(UO 79-80)

When the water recedes, the fishes that are left by the flooded water in the rice field died. It seems as if the mud and the sun have entered into a conspiracy and killed the fishes in the rice-field.

---the paddy fields

Will hoard their fish

till the mud enters into

a conspiracy with the sun

and strangles them.

(UO 80)

Similarly, in the poem “Collage II: Mother”, the corrupted India is personified as a sad and sick mother who is bruised and wounded, drags herself to the sacred city of Benares to die.

Mother I hope

something happens to my vision

the day you
 dragging your feet
 wounds smeared with ants
 crawl towards Benares
 to die.

(UO 56)

Imagery is an essential ingredient of all poetry. It becomes a powerful instrument of communication in the hands of Daruwalla. With the minimum use of words, he has the capacity to create vivid, visual, realistic and powerful images before the eyes of the readers. He uses abundance of images that everyone whole-heartedly accepts when Dwivedi says, “Open any page of his poetry at random and you will have a feast of delightful images” (174). In the words of Madhusudan Prasad:

He has an uncanny gift for presenting some unfamiliar situations [...] with familiar images and familiar situations with the jolt of unfamiliar shocking images which grip the mind of the reader (63).

For example, in “Death by Burial”, a shower of imagery comes down abundantly when he gives the catalogue of the misdeeds of the burglars in a series of lines. To describe the beating given to the captured prisoners, Daruwalla uses a powerful imagery as:

There is nothing much to distinguish
 One lathi blow from another:
 the same inverted back, the same arc through the air
 the curve consummated on the cowering body.

(UO 18)

Another aspect of Daruwalla’s poetry is his profound use of irony. Turning over any page of the poet’s volume, one can witness his mastery over the use of irony to write his

masterly satires. His ironic remarks sometimes end with a deadly sting and sometimes with a comical wit in the sudden disclosure of foible or hypocrisy. There are a few touches of amusing irony in the poem, “Collage I”. Here, the leaders claim that they have abolished problems like land lordism, drinking, the trade of prostitution from the G.B. road, etc.,

Who says we have done nothing?

we have abolished zamindari

and liquor and English

and driven out the whores from the G.B. Road.

(UO 53)

Banning of liquor, for example, has led to the more dangerous problem of manufacturing other spurious liquor. Infact, drinking can never be banned. But the hypocritical polititians and leaders boast that they have abolished this evil from the society. The poem concludes with a devastating irony when the poet says that if there is a plague and if the medical researchers need rats to perform experiments to find an anti-plague vaccine, rats would then begin to be sold in the black market. The use of irony makes his satirical poems more pungent, more satirical and more interesting.

There is always a heavy clustering of similes and metaphors in Daruwalla’s poems. 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 the foam left by the receding waves. The most unusual metaphors can be found in “The Ghaghra in Spate”, when the river is described as a “grey smudge in the afternoon”, an “overstewed coffee” in the evening and “a red weal/ across the spine of the land” at night. In the same way, Daruwalla’s original similes can be found in “Ruminations”, when the poet says he can smell violence in the air “like the lash of coming rain”. This feeling seems to the poet to be “poised like a cobra”. Such an application of similes and metaphors makes his poems as fresh as morning stars.

Daruwalla has chosen free verse as the medium of communication to convey his thoughts and feelings. But no two of his poems are written in the same kind of free verse. It has its own rhythm. Smooth rhythmic flow and sudden swift change in rhythm provide

effective musical qualities to his poems. The typographical arrangement of his stanzas gives visual effect to the poem. For example, in “The Beggar”, he describes the beggar as:

while layers on the flux of experience
shift and change
like oil – patches
on the sinews
of moving water.

(UO 79)

Almost every poem is written in a kind of non-metrical verse. Daruwalla does not follow a regular and controlled stanzaic pattern. He himself says, “A long irregular line helps me in my descriptive passages. I tend to make my verse as condensed and harsh as possible” (qtd. In Nabar 283). His poems are also filled with many italicized words and alliterations.

Daruwalla does not give importance to capitalization and punctuation. In many of his earlier poems, he breaks the rules of printers and grammarians and experiments with his method by avoiding punctuation marks to give multiple meanings to his verse. However, it becomes obscure sometimes.

Daruwalla is a master of the English language. Though his poems are free from classical allusions and references, his choice of words and his unusual capacity to construct phrases, clauses and sentences are to be appreciated. Although many of his poems are easy to understand, he always uses vocabulary which is scholarly. His coinage of phrases like “lacerated lobes”, “a cobbler flaying hides”, “through which a singhi / sucks the malady from wounds” in the poem “Death by Burial” deserve great attention. Again, his discriminating choice of well-chosen economical words and his ability to combine them into effective phrases can be seen in “The Ghaghra in Spate” where he uses words like “overstewed coffee”, “half a street goes churning in the river-belly”, “prayers are parabolic”, “houses sag on to their knees / in a farewell obeisance” and “fear turns phantasmal”. This kind of arresting phrases in his poems aptly bring out the explicit emotions. In fact, his

irregular line is balanced with tense and harsh words and phrases. Daruwalla also makes the readers spell bound by giving dramatic qualities to his poems. Some of his poems are filled with monologue, dialogue and debate.

On the whole, Daruwalla's craftsmanship occupies a unique place in the world of Indo-Anglian poetry. By using simplicity of diction, controlled rhythm, realistic and striking imagery and similes, he has done a valuable service in the field of poetry. He has not followed any other poet as his model. He never imitated the Englishmen. The well-chosen diction, the compact structure of the poem, the condensation of the facts, feelings and ideas, the imagery and the rhythm of the words and the lines, all these combine to make his poetry a great success.

Abbreviation:

UO - Under Orion by Keki N. Daruwalla

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