

# An Exposition of Keki Daruwalla's Poems with special reference to *Wolf* and *Hawk*

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**Abstract:** Keki N Daruwalla is one of the most daring innovators of Indian poetry in English. He begins his poems in an individual note but without any great effort, he raises it to the level of universal realization. He keeps an eye like a guard on the anomalies happening in and around the lives of the general people. Through the animal imageries, he projects the psyche of human beings who have lost the warmth of the heart and do not care for others. In the poem, *Hawk*, the hawk is victimised for the wealthy people's own pleasure where as the poem *Wolf* represents inner fears and doubts of people about the animal.

This paper tries to reflect the different sorts of predicament experienced by the weak sections of the Indian society through the animal imagery.

**Key words:** exploitation, psyche, anomalies, injustice etc.

Indian English poetry is the oldest form of Indian English literature, which has attained a high fecundity. In the mid twentieth century, this branch has been its emergence from the mainstream of English literature and becomes a part of Indian English literature. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment. The Pre- Independence poets expressed Indian themes in the Romantic and Victorian modes and adhered to their form and prosody, but the Post- Independence poets manifest extensive experimentation, divergence from the conventional modes of expression and exercise of liberty in form and content, and use of language. The conflict between tradition and modernity at various levels- social, cultural, familiar, national and cosmopolitan are well marked in the works of these new poets. One of the most significant poet of this period is Keki N. Daruwalla who is well recognised as a modern poet by the reader and the critic alike for the projection of newer thoughts. He openly expresses his protests against the unpleasant circumstances; injustice prevailed in Indian society which helps the readers to gain a true picture of modern Indian society. He is 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 such representation necessarily leads to difficult poetry. Despite this difficulty his influence on modern poetic diction has been immense. Using the dramatic monologue and free verse as literary weapons, the poet makes a complete departure from the already established tradition of rhyming romantic poetry to a newer tradition, labelled as modern poetry regarding theme and style. All the volumes of his poetry written by him record his interest not only in the ancient history but also in the recent themes, displaying a sense of bleak realism. He questions why there is everywhere the ugly and dreadful things instead of the flower, the candle and the other good objects which influence him to write. He believes that the good elements in society carry peace to this violence-torn World. Nissim Ezekiel writes about his (Daruwalla) writings : "By putting Daruwalla among his contemporaries, one sees how he scores over them. By depth of feeling, economy of language and originality of insight, Daruwalla commands respect". (Pandey p6)

Without any hesitation, Daruwalla uses bold and powerful imagery to speak of the evils of the present day society. His profession also provides him opportunities to observe life in India in all its manifestation. It enriched his knowledge of human nature and life.

The title of his poems like *Curfew in a Riot Town City*, *Routine*, *Curfew II* and *Walking to the Centre* express his observation as a police officer. He portrays the theme of the identity crisis and the present day problems which awakened every reader by exposing the sense of identity loss of modern people. Economic disparity, injustice, communal violence, corruption, disintegration are foremost issues which are vividly reflected in his poems with touches of irony and sarcasm. He tries to give a proper shape to Indian society and culture by flinging ironies on various characters in our society. Like Ezekiel, he has also described a truthful picture of the landscape of this country. About his poetry, he rightly holds the view: "I am not an urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscape. My poetry is earthy, and I like to consciously keep it that way, shunning sophistication which, while adding grass, takes away from the power of verse." (Naikar 30) As a word painter, he has sketched vivid, sensuous and impressionistic pictures of rivers, mountains, sky, hills, plains and pastures etc. His landscapes generally cover the vast countryside of north India which is described in *The Ghagra in Spate*. Poems from the *Tarai* picturesquely describe the landscape of *Tarai*. Landscape is an integral part in his poems. He himself remarks "My poems are rooted in landscape which anchors the poem. The landscape is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination....." (Inamdar 62)

Daruwalla is influenced by Ted Hughes, the great animal poet and partially his style has the similarities of Hughes' animal depiction. Animals appear frequently throughout his work as deity, metaphor, persona, and icon. He has taken them as literary weapons to bring in the contemporary ugliness which he encountered as a police officer. Through the animal imageries, he projects the psyche of human beings who have lost the warmth of the heart and do not care for others.

*Hawk* is one of the most striking poems of Daruwalla. It is highly symbolic, imagistic, thoughtful, subtly ironical and full of spirit of rebellion against exploitation, repression and anarchy. The bird hawk is the symbol of rebellion against the unjust social order. Although the poet's innate sympathy is with the exploited and the repressed, he maintains perfect balance and objectivity in this poem. The poem presents the background of the art of hawking which is practised by some wealthy people, particularly in the Middle-East countries. Here, the poet has portrayed how human being becomes the enemies not only to their own species but also extend their cruelty to the animal world. He throws light on the cruelty and selfishness of the human, bringing in a contemporary world of the bird and the man. His interest in the tradition of hawking is not at all pleasant; instead he believes that human beings are predators by nature and they are merciless than the animal predators. With the help of animal images, Daruwalla reveals his ache about the bird. A reader may call this poem, an outcry against the art of hawking. The poet observes a wild hawk flying in the morning and in the evening and each time the poet notices its behaviour. Being a predator he searches for food with a revolving momentum. Its swift – flight seems as if it was "riding and ascending wind." From the sky the hawk observes his prey.

Daruwalla draws the picture of the hawk king with a different imagination against the morning and evening sky. In the morning, it flies but does not kill any bird but in the evening, it rules the sky and breaks the peace and holds a pigeon with its powerful heel-talon. To indicate the force of the hawk, the poet has used the word 'skewered'. The poet minutely observes the hawk's strong and powerful movements. With fast movement, it chooses which one will be the next victim. The next prey may be from the group of the 'black dregs' which are disliked by the hawk. This line expresses the real fact of the animal world that though the hawk is a predatory bird but it kills its prey for food only.

The poet expresses the art of hawking and how the bird undergoes with unpleasant moments when it is caught and fed by the man who is the real predator. The poet has said that although the style of killing the prey for food make the hawk cruel in our eyes, yet the domesticated of the birds by the people is worse because they are touched and trapped by man and their own right has been violated. Just for their gratification, man entraps the wild hawk in the woods and its eyelids are stitched by silk threads.

“When snared in the woods  
his eyelids are sewn with silk  
as he is broken to the hoods” (Lines: 22-24)

Daruwalla makes a protest against this because a bird neither wants silk neither thread nor the ‘breast of quarry birds’ but it only wants its own freedom of movement. The hawk is blinded, starved and its vision. It has lost everything and unfortunately people make this powerful hawk to a device for their own recreation. When the bird’s vision is slowly released after opening stitch after stitch, it notices a smaller world and his eyes travel at the speed of a storm. His vision is limited now after he is trapped by man.

The process of taming the hawk and depriving it of ties own momentum is full of cruelty. Though the hawk is fed with the ‘breast of the quarry bird’ it gets revengeful. The poet says that men do an incredible torture to this innocent bird which gives ache to the poet.

After bearing this torture, gradually, the hawk wishes to fly as before but it cannot move at its normal speed because after being subjugated it has lost his power to do so. Gradually, it is deprived of its natural rhythm. The poet reveals that hawking is an interesting game for the wealthy people who do not bother about the pathetic plight of the hawk. They feed the hawk well to get good performance from the bird but it loses its gyrating movement in the high sky. It is stuck to the ground. For example, the mother hawk and son are let out for flying and a hare is given to them as prey but even they are together, they cannot kill the hare at one sweep. The irony here lies in the fact that being a predator ,once, it skewers pigeon and other birds with its heel-talon in the top of sky, but now its prey, the hare on the ground can escape its grasp. In the first stanza the hawk king ‘ran amok’ but in the fifth stanza the grip of his ‘talon heel’ becomes ‘one talon-morsel at a time’. The poet has ironically presented the situation that if the hawk had killed the hare in its natural way, the hare would not have suffered so much .

“His heart is a burning stable  
packed with whinnying horses.  
His blood writes stories on the scuffed grass!” (Lines:53-55)

After being trained by man, the hawk has started to create chaos in the animal world. Again “ his heart is a burning stable.....”. and “And his movements are a scribble on the page of death” is a mixed metaphor that speaks of the reality about man’s nature. The poet tries to focus on the issue on the cruelty of man as it is extended to the hawk.

The poem reminds us of another poem titled as *Hawk Roosting* by Ted Hughes, the great modern English poet. Both of them show the respective endings in equally powerful ways,

“During the big drought which is surely going to come  
The doves will look up for clouds, and it will rain hawks.”

(Hawk by Daruwalla Lines: 78-79)

Both the poets observe a retributive energy in the non-human world unleashed by mans own cruelty.

While reading the poetry of Daruwalla, one is bound to have the feeling that he or she has transported to a bizarre world. No other Indian English poet delves so deep into the mysterious inner world of human psyche as does he. Sardonic and sarcastic, he is a poet of some hard heart, as because sentimentality has nothing to do with. He sees it all with his hawkish imagery. He writes with a vision, and the vision follows him like a shadow. After reading and scrutinizing the poem Hawk ,you will be able to understand that how the two world—(human world & animal world) placed side by side with a vision to focus the cruelty, and selfishness of both , but man

is shown as more cruel than animal. As we know that a hawk, by nature is a predator, a killer with the voice of a man who is so filled with apathy for life that he sees no pain in hurting others.

Hawk symbolises the cruelty of mankind. When it is attached with human world, it becomes an oppressive creature which suffer a great torture and pain.

The poem *Wolf* is based on myth and reality which lurks a sense of nostalgia regarding the childhood fear of the poet about a wolf. With the help of mixed metaphors, mingle of past memory with the present reality, Daruwalla makes a journey from innocence to experience through this poem. It reflects the picture of the prowler, wind- sniffer, throat catcher, wolf that always knot a story spoken to him by his mother. On the other hand, his daughter, representative of modern generation inclines to believe it. So, the concept of dream, memory, and a sense of alienation are fully reflected in this poem.

The blending of imagination and reality is an important aspect of Daruwalla's poetry which is visible in this poem also. The poet in his childhood believed in the stories about the animal world which are simple narrated by his mother. He was afraid of that because wolf was coming in his dream which was the result of his mother's narrative. Now the picture is completely changed because of the progression of time. This story does not make her scared and she is unwilling to swallow that same story. It also cannot make her panic as there is no scope for imagination in her mind. Her conception about the gun makes it reality that when there appears a wolf, there is also the gun to overthrow it. There is no more fear, no more imagination around the story of wolf. It breaks an old tradition and progresses to a newer one where less space for children is noticed. Daruwalla thinks that it happens due to the modern techniques seen by our new generation from the time they understand things in their surroundings. Daruwalla imagines a wolf is a part of his childhood or his past and it brings the imaginary picture of the animal, wolf. It is projected into his mind in such a way that creates a terror but, actually he has never faced that animal in reality at that time. So, the idea of a wolf is half- projected by the bedtime- story and is half –myth too for him.

“Fire-lit  
half silhouette and half myth  
the wolf circles my past  
treading the leaves into a bed  
till he sleeps, black snout  
on extended paws.”(Lines: 1-6)

The first stanza reflects the poet's dreams in his childhood about the wolf. As a child, he always had the thinking that how the wolf looked, where it made its way, and the black snouts on extended paws of it --all mingled with dread and fear. He imagines the wolf with a black stout on its sulphur body and it is slowly moving into his consciousness. The beginning of the poem builds up the idea of the poet's childhood spent in a calm and quite village against the childhood enjoyed by his daughter in the city. He has believed that the wolf is a ferocious animal.

The poet, as a child imagines wolf as a ferocious animal. The child believes the story of the wolf told by his mother and he is afraid of it as it is a prowler, wind sniffer, throat –catcher etc. His mother told him about the ears of the wolf that stood up when dew fell. It is always ready to catch its prey. It is too powerful to sniff out the approaching dreams of a child and the child should sleep well. Listening the story, the child sleeps; otherwise it would be attacked by the savage wolf.

A sense of proximity is perceived by the poet, but suddenly he comes to reality as he has shared his daughter's thoughts. Now, he has realised that wolf's story cannot put his daughter to sleep. The description of the sulphur body, black snout on its paws, does not terrify the child who is born and brought up in the city. The base reality of the changing times has gripped the poet. The reality has been concretized and the wolf is no more fear-factor for the new generation.

"The wolves have been slaughtered now.

A hedge of smoking gun-barrels  
rings my daughter's dreams." (Lines: 26-28)

With economy of words, Daruwalla has narrated his beliefs of childhood, and his experiences of a father. The picture of a village has been portrayed by him and he has used trivial objects like the leaves, hedge and areas like forest edge and the phrase dark night. The difference between the father as child and his own child stems from their background. Since he hails from the village, he does not know how to disbelieve and that is why his village situated at the edge of the forest gate carries the picture of the wolf to him appearing at the night. His daughter lives in the lit up city and she knows that there is no possibility of a wolf entering there. When she listens to the story of the same wolf, she thinks that if it comes, it can be killed by the gun and it is not an animal to be afraid of. 'The Wolves have been slaughtered now' implies that the story of the wolf is no longer needed by the children as they are aware of scientific stories made for the new generation. The daughter belonging to it, so she would not dream of the wolf, instead she would dream of gun-barrels and smoke.

A sense of nostalgia regarding his childhood forms the theme of the poem. The desire to tell his daughter a story of a wolf is being rejected. So the concept of dream, memory, and a sense of alienation from the present generation work in this poem. The poem may be read as the poet's journey from innocence to experience. Besides, we can add that it narrates the complications of urban life. Urban life snatches the imagination of a blessed childhood while the village children still imagine as they are not exposed to an environment of crime and terror.

The poet has forwarded his concern for the tradition of storytelling to teach a child and how this tradition is gradually missing. The imagery of the wolf has dominated the theme from the beginning of the poem to the end while the end comes strikingly as the wolves are being slaughtered. Surprisingly, the poet's quest for tradition still remains even as he declares that his daughter's dream is about the smoking gun barrels.

After discussing the two poems, one can perceive the nature, form and the literary devices used in the Daruwalla's poems. Daruwalla proves himself to be an observer of socio political cultural reality of contemporary India. *Hawk* explains his awareness of the lovelessness, alienation and the cruelty of modern man. He has satirized human nature and compares man and bird. We see the poet's intention to show in the false aristocracy –rather, we may call it hypocrisy in the art of hawking. He directly criticizes the man behind hawking who violates the law of nature for his pleasure. The Hawk kills the smaller birds for food and not for fun. But man destroys the sanctity of the animal world for their own pleasure. We see the climax of the poem while the hawk declares that it will not surrender to man and one day it will take revenge on the catcher. Using the device of dramatic monologue, the poet intensifies the situation wherein the birds suffer from modern man's heartlessness.

The *Wolf* on the other hand, is another variation of Daruwalla's poetry which taking us to the poet's imaginary world. Wolf brings a nostalgic effect. His own past is not the same as that of his daughter's because his slept listening to the stories told by his mother, but

his daughter belongs to the new generation who does not believe in those stories of wolf. Besides, she is aware of the power of guns by which the animal can be killed. The blending of imagination and reality is an important aspect of his poetry which is visible in this poem.

Daruwalla is a humanist. His social responsibility has been the motivating factor which focuses the burning issues of the contemporary society which generally are overlooked by others. In his poetry, he explicitly identifies the irrationality of human beings. Not only these two poem deal with the animal imagery of a hawk or a wolf, but also the other poems of him record this imagery. With using this, he has added a special touch to his poems. He has experimented with this imagery, which are borrowed from the old and conventional models. The animal imagery is far bolder to convey his hatred for the bad practices practiced by human beings like hawking. Consequently, it can be said that the animal imagery in Daruwalla's poetry is evocative of powerful feelings. Their names can create panic in the mind of someone but the poet ironically reveals that man is more frightful than these animals.

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