

MONOLOGUES OF KEKI N. DARUWALLA- AN EXPOSITION OF CHARACTERS AND SITUATIONS

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Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla, being born in a Parsi family in Lahor and spending a long career in Indian Police Service, got an opportunity to witness various crucial events and critical situations. The vivid and diverse experience as a police officer, assistant to the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, and having served on various foreign missions, expanded his perception and outlook towards history, society, culture and rituals and the way human beings think and behave. This also has a direct bearing on his poetry and expression. Despite being in Police Service and having a busy lifestyle, Daruwalla has published a good amount of poetry, essays, novels and short stories. He has produced diverse variety of poems; diverse in subject matter as well as in style, some poems are love lyrics while some are sheer speeches, some a mere brooding of a poet looking to the past, and some are written in the form of dramatic monologues. Daruwalla's dramatic monologues are of good quality and as one reads them, he is reminded of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. Some of the many dramatic monologues written by Daruwalla are "Monologue in the Chambal Valley", "The King Speaks to the Scribe", "We, the Kauravas" "Old Sailor", "The Hebrew Professor", "The Ghana Scholar Reflects on his Thesis", "Old Map-Maker", "Curfew 2" etc.

Daruwalla's dramatic monologues not only reveal the character of the speaker and the listener but also give us clues about the contemporary society and events. His "Monologue in the Chambal Valley" in *From Under Orion* (1970) is a mirror to the corrupt system and presents a bitter truth about the hollow structure of the Judiciary as well as the Police. How the corrupt government employees accept bribe and help looters and dacoits. In this monologue the bandit chief is speaking to the other bandit who had betrayed him and had become a police informer. The chief bandit is narrating the informer as to how he managed to escape the capital punishment by bribing the Judge's Stenographer and the Warder:

You'd like to know how I escaped, would'nt you?
It was graft all the way, first the Judge's Stenographer.
'It's the rope for you,' he said. We bribed him more
And he didn't type the judgement on the given day.
We bribed the Warder, got large-sized
Handcuffs and a wrist-band to boot
And beneath the hand a thick layer of grease.
After that it was simple: a jerk and I was off. (26-33)

Though the betrayed bandit chief is narrating the way he escaped the prison, but indirectly he is commenting on the corrupt system which provides loop holes to the criminals to escape punishment. How easily the bandit escapes, punishment by bribing at various levels, show the pathetic condition of our corruption ridden system.

Daruwlla's monologues also reveal the characters and their inner tensions and their personal philosophies. The bandit chief in "Monologue in the Chambal Valley" expresses his own fear of being caught or betrayed again or being killed.

And he concludes the there is no difference between the desire to kill someone and the fear of being killed.

My nights are still uneasy, turning over
what bait you will set for me
what ambush you will spring.
My dreams are full of rat-traps
The desire to kill and the fear of being killed
are aspects of the same passion. (74-79)

It is indeed a bold expression by Daruwalla when he describes that the bandits used to deal in selling females and the way the bandit chief speaks about the girl from Kullu:

You remember the one from Kullu, wire-thin and catty
A night I lay with her, and next day
When the buyer came, the shindy she kicked!
Clinging to me with her nails and her teeth
As if we were married for over twenty years!

It is also noteworthy that here the poet wants to suggest that the bandit chief has no right to get angry at the betrayal by his fellow man. Because here it is indicated that he had also cheated 'the girl from Kullu'.

"The King Speaks to the Scribe" in *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982) deals with another critical situation. After the war of Kalinga which proved to be a turning point in the life of the great emperor Ashoka, the emperor is brooding over the aftermaths of the war. And this monologue inspects the introspection made by the emperor and the instructions he gives to his scribe then after. "It is a poem that takes a single moment in history and helps us see it with fresh eyes. When a poem expands our thinking and understanding in new ways, it affects us deeper, cognitively and emotionally, than we can ever know. (Bhatt)

In this monologue, King Ashoka is so aggrieved to see the bloodshed in the war he has undertaken to capture Kalinga that he decides to shun violence and impart the message of peace and non-violence to the world. "His lacerated and penitent spirit prepares him to own the lowliest, the aggrieved, and those separated from their kin; and to be covered by the by the dust of humility" (Narula 20).

The emperor Ashoka wants his scribe to carve out his message so deep that time cannot delete or erode it: Cut deeper than the cuts of my sword / so that even as moss covers the letters / they are visible. / Write whatever you chance on (56-59). He wants his message to be written in a language which the common folk can understand and therefore asks his scribe for the same. The violence and the pain to see the weeping widows and children have broken his opinion towards religion. He doesn't care if there is no timber for altar-fires, as he needs timber to burn funeral pyres:

And the language simple,
something the forest folk can understand.

.....
I am not here
to appease gods. Even they must be ignored.
for a while and their altar-fires turn cold.
Men don't have enough fuel to burn their dead. (61-61, 65-68)

Daruwalla's monologues not only examine characters but situations too. The situations are critical revealing the whole context. But he does not reach to the conclusion and provides an open end to the monologue leaving ample space for the reader to have his own conclusion. Daruwalla is very bold and sometimes blunt in his expression. Whether it is emperor Ashoka who says he doesn't care if altar fires remain cold for a while.

His "We, the Kauravas" from *New Poems* (2000-2005), the reader is shocked when the Kauravas are shown not as villains but as the victims of destiny. The plight of the Kauravas is brought forth through this monologue. The oblique reference to Lord Krishna is shocking and is a bold and uncommon expression by the poet:

They [the Pandavas] had a God-man too.
He tattooed his body completely blue.
He had an air-conditioned ashram at Mathura.
If he as much as sneezed
they took him to Apollo or Batra.
And while we bled in battle and died, he gave
endless lectures on truth and righteous action,
all the while teaching our enemies how to kill us. (31-38)

The description here is very sarcastic and the poet seems to not understand the philosophy of *Bhagavad Gita* propounded by Lord Krishna; the blue-tattooed God-man, as he calls Him.

In "The Hebrew Professor" from *The Map-Maker* (2002), the professor in Hebrew language speaks to his students and reveals the reason behind his choosing this language. He is a refugee and because he had to leave his country, his city, his home and everything, therefore his language was the only thing he could possess.

We moved in here during the war,
from the fringe of pogroms
to the outskirts of Jaffa.
In '48 my teacher said to me,
'If you don't belong to a city,
a country an age
you must surely belong to a language!'
And so I took to Hebrew. (34-41)

In his monologues, Daruwalla uses irony and satire very frequently. And something new and uncommon comes out as the conclusion. He has mastery over making generalization. His monologues begin with a personal note and end with a universal declaration. In "The King Speaks to the Scribe" Daruwalla, beginning with the personal sorrow of the King he ends up on a Universal message of peace and non-violence. In "The Hebrew Professor" He again ends giving

the same Universal message of peace. In “Monologue in the Chambal Valley”, he starts with the agony of the betrayed of the bandit chief but again ends with the general philosophy that fear of being killed and desire of killing someone are very much the same. Daruwalla’s characters being stuck in a critical situation, not only reveal themselves but also reveal the whole context which led to that critical situation. His monologues are of good quality and embrace both personal and universal thoughts.

Works Cited

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