



Keki N. Daruwalla, the Indian Swift

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Abstract

Corruption, poverty, violence, racial riots, politician's lust for power, etc., all such social stigmas are at their heights in the contemporary world. Every common man is personally affected by it and he becomes the victim of these social mishaps though he is also responsible for it. Many writers across the world, unable to tolerate, portray all these negative aspects and pinpoints the root cause of these problems in their works of art. They try to awaken the readers and bring a solution to this problem. Some are mild and gentle and some others are very harsh in their treatment. Having read Jonathan Swift's pungent satires in British Literature, and when exposed to the harsh satirical poems of Daruwalla in Indian Literature, I can identify similar satirical veins in both the writers. This paper analyses how Keki N. Daruwalla can rightly be called 'The Indian Swift'. By taking into consideration a few of his poems and Swift's pungent satire "A Modest Proposal", the modern Indo-Anglian poet, Daruwalla and the eighteenth century English satirist, Jonathan Swift are compared.

Keywords: boldness, proposal, pungent, satire, society.

Introduction

Good writers cannot escape from having social consciousness in them. Right from the time of Chaucer to till date, many writers are obsessed with the contemporary social happenings and events that happen around them and expose them in their works of art. Daruwalla and Swift are such writers whose main concern is to portray the evils of the society. Dissatisfied with the unpleasant but inevitable picture of one side of the contemporary society, they took the weapon called satire and used it liberally to portray the follies and weaknesses of the society around them. With the help of irony, they honestly and courageously, with moral conviction and humour, lashes the follies, pretensions, shame and hypocrisy of an individual and the society.





Body

Daruwalla, being a police officer by profession, had the rarest opportunity to witness all social mishappenings right before his eyes. So, it is “the work of a man who sees disease, crime, squalor and delusion in the world about him” (Hulse 13). As his professional experience forms the themes for his poems, he had an authentic voice to portray the filthy side of the Indian socio-political world of his time. He himself describes his poetry as “totally impressionistic recording of subjective responses” (qtd. in Mukherjee 51).

Daruwalla is a socialist. His poetry reveals his ceaseless battle against the evil forces of society. He hates superstition, casteism, exploitation and tyranny. He believes that man is a victim of social evils and man is the reason for the miseries of mankind. Although many writers have attempted social criticism in their own way, they do not have enough insight and enough boldness. Jayanta Mahapatra admits that, “even in the freedom of saying what we think, we are not able to say those things – and I too have been a coward that way” (Prasad 63). So most of their writings are dilute and unauthentic. But Daruwalla, having acquired authentic experience and basic boldness from his profession, ferociously exposes the bitter and biting realities of life boldly and frankly in a straight-forward manner. Robert Graves rightly comments, “Keki N. Daruwalla is the one Indian poet writing in English in whom I recognize the compulsion to tell the whole truth, however cruel” (Dharwadker 37).

In one of his complex, horrible and moving satires, “A Modest Proposal”, Jonathan Swift suggests a horrible proposal for economic crisis in Ireland through which he satirizes the demoralised downtrodden Irish people, and the luxurious, indifferent, dishonest and greedy upper class people. He shocks the whole public by his proposal that both the poor parents and children would suffer less than they do at present if young children are fattened and sold for food. As the increasing prodigious number of population has become a great burden to the deplorable condition of Ireland, Swift says that this proposal, children can be used as food, is more practicable and puts an end to all the prevailing problems of Ireland. This method will be of great use because it prevents the horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children and the expense of the parents. Just to create awareness in the minds of the high class officials and politicians, Swift has come forward with this ‘modest proposal’.

In the same way, like Swift, in sheer disgust with the dirt, corruption and stink of the human world, Daruwalla also comes forward with a proposal in the form of prayer. He also shocks the whole public through his earnest and sincere prayer,





.... dump them on another planet Lord

..... For ten years let seed

stay clear of the uterus.

Let one generation be sterile.

Castrate the buggers if you like.

No more men! No more women!

Save us Lord! Save us from ourselves. (WP 68-69)

He prays that he should offset the evil of over – population by preventing measures of sterilization and the veterinary measure of castration. Instead of praying for granting spiritual and moral strength, he asks the Lord to effect negative measures in all cynical vehemence in a tone of urgency and mocking anger.

In both these writers, their anger is expressed in a satirical tone. Daruwalla's satires are so wild, so concentrated, so violent, so pungent and so sore like Swift that it would not be a misnomer to call him an Indian Swift. What Swift did in prose in England is done by Daruwalla in poetry in India. Their rage towards the society, their sympathy towards it and their wish to refine it are all beautifully transferred into a fine language. Their disgust with the society, their dissatisfaction with the established social order, their daring presentation of it in their works of art and thereby their hopes for the establishment of a better one, turn them to be the pungent satirists. So both, the English Swift and the Indian Swift, can be called the crusaders against inequality and injustice.

Both Daruwalla and Swift are sceptic and cynic. Their view of life is tragic and pessimistic. They are dissatisfied with the tragic and disastrous society. Their works are the outcome of their self-controlled and repressed anger. They are disappointed with the sorry state of affairs, they expose the weaknesses and shortcomings like poverty, ill-health and starvation that prevail on a large scale in their country in a strong, forceful, scathing and emphatic language. In fact, all such social drawbacks are not confined to any single state or country. But they are all international phenomena. So, their works attain universal significance.

Just like Jonathan Swift, the present malady of the society makes the satires of Daruwalla, "drip with bile and acid" (qtd in Prasad 63) and his main purpose is to bring peace and harmony in the society. So, his urgency to reform the society makes him a





satirist as satire is the best weapon of a reformer. All the established sections of the Indian society – academicians, politicians, priests, bureaucrats and the common people are vehemently criticized by him. No one can deny when Sinha says, “Much of Daruwalla’s poetry is the poetry of the summer noon and it will be futile to search for the soft evening sun there” (Sinha, 192).

The fickle mindedness and the stupidity of the people are criticized by both Daruwalla and Swift. People are easily cheated as they do not use their reasoning power. Both the writers pity them for their stupidity as well as scorn them for their ignorance. In many of his river poems, Daruwalla vividly describes the intense sufferings and distress of the people during and aftermath of the nightmarish flood. People are fully aware of the damage and destruction it causes. But they do not take any precaution to protect themselves against flood. No constructive step is taken to prevent the flooded water entering the village. After the water recedes, causing great damage and destruction, they again settle down in and around the same place and lead their life peacefully till they encounter the flood in the next year. Daruwalla is satirical when he describes the common sights that are to be found along the banks of the river. Here, “Lepers huddle along the causeways” (CR 16). The river has become a place of exhibition for the beggars to exhibit their bodily deformities. They exhibit their physical handicaps like blindness, lameness, paralysis and leprosy. Sitting on the banks of the river, they do their best to attract the attention of the worshippers in order to extract as much money as possible from them. So, “the Ganga flows through the land, / not to lighten the misery / but to show it” (CR 16).

Beggary is a widespread evil in India and the eighteenth century Ireland. The sight of a beggar is common everywhere in both the countries. Just like Swift who depicted the plight of beggars and the uncaring government, Daruwalla also has brought out the same in his poems. The filth, squalor, dirt and unhygienic atmosphere that surround a beggar is brought into focus by the poet in “The Beggar”. The untidy and the uncombed hair of the stone like beggar look like the short and stiff hair of a pig or a swine. He is suffering from chronic wounds which attract the flies. His wounds are surrounded by insects and worms. “Maggots, worms / crawl like changing seasons” (UO 78). He sits in the same place polluting the entire atmosphere. But the government doesn’t take any step to improve his condition and to abolish this problem. It doesn’t provide proper food and shelter to him. He is not admitted in any hospital or home centre. His death is insignificant. After his death, his place will simply be replaced by another beggar equally ill-seeming.





The stupidity, uncaring and the vain glory of the government officials and the higher authorities and their interest in leading a luxurious life is depicted by both Daruwalla and Swift. In “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. It is very difficult to find a true, loyal, devoted and corrupt free politician. They spend their time happily in luxurious five star hotels and so naturally they have nothing to do with the misery and suffering of the people. The immorality of the politicians is again pointed out in “Food and Words, Words and Food” as: “He is an old leader after all / Who has gone thrice to jail / - twice for home – rule / and once for sodony. The money mindedness and self-centredness of the upper class society which remains unheard of the sufferings of the poor is again revealed when he says, “No end to hoarding. / Breaking open the lockers they find / a briefcase full of rice” (WP 27). When the whole area is affected by famine and draught, the upper class people are busy with the mean practice of hoarding grains.

In “Collage I”, Daruwalla enlists the achievements of the government officials and politicians in their own words through which he mocks at the misrepresentation of the whole situation by them. They say:

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)

The politician’s list of achievements include establishing electric crematoriums to cremate unclaimed dead bodies, opening sewer mouth into the river, abolishing liquor etc., No fruitful constructive work is done by them. Abolishing prostitutes from the particular G.B. Road, for instance, led to the driving of prostitutes from the particular road without providing any other alternative method of earning their livelihood. This may lead to the spreading of this evil everywhere in the society. Opening of the sewer-mouth, for instance, is suggestive of the growing water pollution. Completely banning liquor is not possible. The greatest irony lies 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.





Conclusion

Thus, some of the satirical pieces of Daruwalla, the Indian Swift, amply illustrate how pungently, scornfully and in a satiric tone he attacks the evils gripping the society. In the words of Ezekiel, "Such a bitter, scornful, satiric tone has never been heard before in Indo-Anglian poetry"(68). Madhusudan Prasad has rightly called him as the "critic of his age" (60). Disillusioned with the chaos, anarchy, bloodshed, widespread corruption, poverty, unemployment and the long cherished moral and ethical decline, he searches for new hopes and values in the degraded modern world. He does not mechanically brood over this aspect of society. Rather, he wants to reform it through his works of art. Though he does not preach moral in his works, by commenting upon the negative side of life, he makes the readers draw a moral at the end of the poem. No one can deny the fact that both Daruwalla and Swift have done a valuable service to humanity. By dealing with various contemporary themes in their own way, they make the readers think what the fate of the country will be if the present condition remains unchecked. Making use of their positions as writers, they perform the function of social commentators and social reformers.

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