

DARUWALLA COVERING WIDE RANGE OF THEMES IN 'THE UNREST OF DESIRES' AND 'IN THE SHADOWS OF IMAMBARA'

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Abstract

The theme of Love and sex occupy predominant place in the section 'The Unrest of Desires'. Daruwalla has recollected his early marital experiences. The poems 'The Night of Jackals', 'Love Among the Pines' are the finest love poems, depicting the pleasure of conjugal love. The poet 'From the Snows in Ranikhet' addresses his newly wedded friend and guiding him how to make maximum use of physical pleasure. Daruwalla has given dramatic touch to some of his poems. In the poems like, 'Apothecary' and 'The Son Speaks to the Dead Rake', the use of dramatic monologue helps the poet in presenting the feelings vividly. The section 'In the Shadow of Imambara' contains some of the best poems. Daruwalla is drawing sustenance from myths, rituals, festivals and religious performances in the poems 'AagMatam', 'Sixth Moharram in Lucknow' and 'The Mazars of Amroha'. In these poems, the theme and tone, structure and imagery interact in creating an absorbing human drama.

Key Words-Conjugal, hell, Apothecary, AagMatam, Hussain, anchorite, ascetic

DARUWALLACOVERING WIDE RANGE OF THEMES IN'THE UNREST OF DESIRES'AND 'IN THE SHADOWS OF IMAMBARA'

- Dr. Shrikant B. Sawant

Keki Daruwalla in 'The Unrest of Desires' is dealing with the theme of love and sex. He has recollected his early marital experiences in 'The Night of Jackals', 'Love Among Pines'. The poet in 'From the Snows of Ranikhet' advises his newly wedded friend how to make maximum use of physical pleasers. 'Daruwalla's experiments in 'confessional' poetry and on the whole, he succeeds admirably in sharing with the reader those moments of furtive and illicit love which make the sum of lovers' precarious paradise' (Maini 95).

'The Night of the Jackals'- a long poem of nine sections deals with the theme of love at physical level. The poem depicts the difficulties which obstruct the consummation of sexual desires of a couple in the absence of privacy. The poet frankly relates a telephonic indication of communication:

It is just the telephone between us,
grey, impersonal :
'The children are sleeping', she says, 'Come!'
She had to think of me now
with the elements in full cry
and the air smelling of lightning burns
like a scorched pelt! (*The Keeper of the Dead* 33)

The poet relates how he is received by his betterhalf. 'She is in my arms / swarming
'and further states

Kissing her on the neck

I nibble the words
as they slur across her skin;
did the thunder frighten you
Yes, with both the kids asleep
it was eerie, terrifying. (34)

When a husband and wife get time they enjoy sexual union. It is graphically described in the following lines.

As if in reply
she presses me harder to herself.
I enter her
the way a boat starved of fresh water
enters a harbour. (34)

Sexual desires change with the season. The poet welcomes July- 'But July, you must come then! / There is different feel about things.' In July morning the lover is fascinated by the queer newness and freshness of his beloved. He narrates how he enjoys the night along with his wife- 'Through the night we drift apart/ and drift into each other. ' (35) His physical craving does not get fully quenched. In the July morning, his wife appears to be 'a coriander leaf', 'newly plucked' and rain washed'. The poet would rest his head on her thighs and bury his face on her soft belly. Daruwalla recollects that a turning point sets in his conjugal life.

The bougainvillea warming
over the roof!
The semul tree!
The flame of the forest! (37)

Redness of the 'semul' flower appears a red alert for his wife because she suffers from cough. She says-'When the semul tree/flowers with embers/that's the time the cough gets me.'(37)She further asks him -

'How will you ever write, my love!

Poetry is written with

the wrong words, don't you know?' (37)

Now, the jackals howl in the night becomes ominous for the poet.-'Their cries herald/the death of the wilderness/the passing of ghosts.'(38)

In March, the women say, 'A spirit / inhabits her'In a reply to the remark, passed by some women, the poet's wife comments:

And tell them I am not

a vine that starts leafing

only in spring

Whenever you are near me I flower. (38)

Her cough does not subside. When it becomes out of breath while coughing, the poet takes her in his arms but she says

One day

I'll die like this,

on your shoulder, coughing !'(39)

Thus, The Night of the Jackals recollects the poet's attachment to wife as well as fear and apprehension about her.

Similarly, lovely and sensual sights incite sensual desires in 'Love Among the Pines'. The poem begins with exquisite lines:

The animal evening moves

like the tiger-wind through the parting of reeds.

The sky is not blue enough today

To catch the pure spiral of your thought.(40)

Enjoying a walk with his wife, the poet catches sight of some sensuous scene which makes him whisper —

destiny lies

in the parting of hair

in the parting of grasses

in the parting of thighs ? (40)

Darshan Singh Maini in his review article comments,

But soon enough, he (the poet) recovers the cunning we associate with his hand:

what is there in my hand that when it

sidles into your blouse it prowls

like an animal that makes you writhe,

turning your nipples into a back sprout of

berries?

The key verbs and tropes at once authenticate the reality of the experience, and the reality of the poetic process(95).

Daruwalla adds an account of his love-making, full of sensuous and voluptuous description:

beneath your skin

of wild talk you are tense,

beneath the cindering ash of my body

your body is a surprise

for as I fall upon the earth-crust that is you

we spin, we spin, we spin

your feet pointed to the skies (40)

Daruwalla picturesquely describes the process of gross physical love, modes and feelings which grip a couple during the moment of sexual gratification. His conception of love is not spiritual. To him sex is essential for happy married life.

'From the Snows in Ranikhet' is another piece of love poem addressed to his newly-wedded friend. So, using full of voluptuousness and sensual elements, the poet instructs him how to make the maximum use of the physical pleasure:

Words, footholds, winds, are trapped in the snow here

a little effort and they can be found.

Just dig through two white feet of silence

till you hit the ground. (41)

The poet relates how physical union creates new life on the earth.

But the goddess of the seasons

still chews her cosmic cud.

Her mastication brings forth

green leaf and golden bud.

Fish will erupt from larval beds

and go downstream with the flood. (41)

In an act of creation, the poet reminds his friend will 'do a little killing', with 'every act in bed'. He also addresses him about the biological phenomena ever-growing in human body. The poem is a good piece of love poem written by the poet for his newly wedded friend.

A strong desire makes man somewhat uneasy. 'The Unrest of Desire' reveals man's incapacity to suppress a desire. 'However you bury the shadow, the eyes would provide some sort of evidence of desire in the man's heart.' 'However you bury the shadow in the heart/under slabs of concrete and a coil of bone.' (43) The poet repeats the line 'However you bury the shadow in the heart'. 'The Unrest of Desire' describes an uncontrolled physical urge that refuses to be restricted. Repression cannot succeed for desire wells up again to destroy' (Raghunandan 249). 'It will char your dreams / however you bury the shadow in the heart'.

'The Parsi Hell' highlights the poet's religious beliefs and ideas. It is a tightly organized poem of the ethnic anguish and shame, is full of felicitous phrases, and explores in some depth the depleted dynamics of a community ravaged by incestuous fevers-a 'marginal' people plagued by 'genetic rust' and 'inbreeding', and waiting for carrion death' (Maini 95). Expressing his own feelings about 'The Parsi Hell', Daruwalla writes:

'The Parsi hell' is insubstantial; a long
stint in the house of falsehood, foul food
and speech turning base on a wailing tongue. (44)

He satirically remarks 'Our hell and heaven have no locus, the scriptures forego / all references to the damned'. He rates scriptures as imaginative deliberations. Lakshmi Raghunandan observes:

'The Parsee communalistic feelings that encourage inbreeding: 'Genetic rust?' instigating the opposite urge to cross over religious barriers for 'Daughter / walkout on the tribe' does not solve or assuage the 'anxieties' which -congregate / and claw at your dreams as they prospect for hell'. The ultimate crossing over all religious barriers takes place only at death (249).

Last, the poet feels that a man carries a death with him if he suffers from the torments of desires. So suppression of desires is equal to carrying of death and hell.

....Throughout life a man carries his death

Even as a woman carries her child

A Parsi carries his hell. (45)

'The Son Speaks to the Dead Rake' presents a dialogue that takes between a son and his deceased father. The poet explicitly states :

Half your looks you loaned me for a lifetime
for better or for worse, nostrils that flare
like a double-barreled gun, rectangular forehead
and a scalp thatched with black, unruly hair. (46)

It is a conversation between the living present and the dead past. Referring to the past of his father, the son asks him:

People spot me from the scaffolding of bone
you've left me. They have walked up and said,
'He was a great man, your father'. Were they referring
to your prowess with the gun, the bottle or in the bed ?(46)

The son expresses his inability saying 'You kept your days and you kept your mistresses, / I find it difficult to even keep my word'. The poet further talks about the unrestricted physical enjoyment of his father - 'What a life! In your youth the pleasures of the flesh / In your old age the obsolete joys of heaven!'

Daruwalla says that the modern man is torn between doubt and belief, lust and guilt and artificial and natural. Referring to the war-mongers and suffering caused by their acts, he adds

You all made handbags out of human skin.
Ours turns to acne and yet we agonize!
Evil has lost its grades, it wears a petty grin.
You had Hitler, we have Idi Amin !(47)

Expressing the heart-felt agony of the modern man, the poet explicitly states his dissatisfaction:

I can't convey to you the meanness of the times
which hands us our achievements already fungus-layered
near those slippery, chimerical altars that we bleed on
for half a lifetime and find the effort wasted. (47)

Perhaps the only convincing lines in this poem are the two concluding ones: 'This is the generation gap, this handshake with the dead/across the ravages of our own respective lusts. '(48)R. A. Singh remarks that 'the modern man still has unquenchable thirst for knowledge which makes him restive for further exploration. The poet rates the achievement of the modern man quite negative but appreciates his inquisitiveness' (139).

The section, 'In the Shadow of the Imambara' contains some of the best poems by Daruwalla. 'One finds, the poet as a passive onlooker who intelligently communicates the happening without being a part of it' (Singh 139). In 'AagMatam', through the ritual of AagMatam, or Fire Mourning, the shock and faithful are re-enacted in which they participate celebrating the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Hussain. Ritually they crumple burning fire under their feet, without expressing even a word of sorrow and pain.

they stamp barefoot across the fire-stubble..
Even children tread the star-clay of this patch,
cinder and fire ash rising to their knees
as the amplifiers urge them on : 'Lovers'
of the Imam. Moths to the flame of Hussain, Come!' (52)

'The whole experience and the intensity of religious emotion and passion are compacted in a single complex image'(Narula 23). The mourners suffer with the Imam and his supporters in the battlefields of 'Karbala'.

Their thirst is a desert as they take the firewalk
their eyes already on Karbala
and heads that rolled and the babe Abdullah.
Duldul, the faithful horse, frothing; the sword
in Hussain's uplifted hand like a scythe
and waiting for him for the harvest of spears! (53)

This also indicates their oneness with the Imam and their supporters.

In 'Sixth Moharram, Lucknow', Daruwalla presents a moving picture of mourning that takes place in Lucknow. Due to the mass-participation, 'Between the Imambara and the Rumi Gate / traffic has clotted like an epileptic tongue' and 'the mourners neither press forward nor recede.' Using images like 'epileptic tongue', 'rooted legs' and 'windlashed tree' the poet presents the live picture of the emotional crowd of the mourners. In an ecstasy of light of the Karbala sun, the human sea sway:

their torsos swaying over rooted legs
like upper reaches of a windlashed tree.
Behind the veil a woman murmurs to her child,
'The spreading weal across their chest recalls
the omen-red of the Karbala-sun'. (54)

S. C. Narula observes. 'the truth and power of the religious emotion embodied in the multiple images give the lamentation its poignancy. It is no mere simulation; but a state Donne attains through experience of love; death in love is perpetration of life' (24). Referring to the emotional involvement of the mourners, the poet comments

it is personal,
this heritage of grief passed by father to son,
the rose bleeding endless through the desert of time. (54)

Therefore, 'they have awaited Moharram / like a tree aching for leaf !', their hope continues to blossom : 'and even as the body shrivels like a fig / they wet their lips with your name, Hussain !' for their deep religious faith.

'Apothecary' is about a Hakim who turns bitter because patients have stopped coming to him. Since a patient from Sarai Khwaja died of stomach ailment, people have stopped coming to him, Daruwalla sympathetically remarks:

Yes, yes. I understand, the death of a patient
is also a death in our family ;
a part of me dies with him. (55)

The boy complained of 'an ear-ache' who misreported and hence misdiagnosed. The Apothecary says — 'Some ear-drops I gave him and forgot about it / till that ekka stood at my door in the evening' and he is informed that the boy is 'threshing around like fish' in pain.

....and when
I reached the village he was already dead,
his mother looking at me as if I had knifed him. (55) .

As a result of this death, pointing to the empty room of the doctor and the injudicious decision of the patients, the poet tries to defend himself.

If a man comes to his lawyer for advice
and is murdered on his way back
will his clients abandon him? Never! (55)

While there are no patients in his clinic, the Homeo clinic across the road is full of them. The apothecary who belongs to a family of royal physicians is angry with everyone. He informs the people that the homeopath is a widower who keeps 'two good-looking compounders'.

A homeopath keeps two handsome

adolescents as his compounders.

Now where does Hippocrates get into the act? (57)

He also prescribes antibiotics like penicillin and 'He promises his clientele prophylactic doses/ against typhus; measles, chicken pox, flu' (57). The poet is highly critical when he speaks-

Pardon me, for I got carried away.

We all pad the hook with the bait, Allah downwards.

What is paradise, but a promissory note

found in the holy book itself? (57)

R. N. Sinha states 'this dramatic monologue not only presents a character and a situation but also a comment on the disappearing art of Indian system of medicine. Even a homeopath has to use penicillin to remain in business' (109).

'The Mazars of Amroha' comprising four beautiful poems

aim at exposing the earthly ambition of the anchorite Nasiruddin and the ascetic Shah Vilayat. Apart from the details of the narration that is interesting from the point of view of the story and the symbolic communication of clay urn full of milk and the rose, the poem has one verse which reveals the poet's sense of mystery of the inexplicable' (Raghunandan 251).

The poems deal with religious order foliating in opposite images; the gain of spiritual strength, and the fall of the spirit from grace, plagued by the pride of human ego. The two Sufis celebrated in these verse are victims of their own foibles and end up in tombs desecrated by scorpion and rolling asses. Shah Vilayat's tomb is crawled all over by scorpions.

It was the scorpions who were on display here,

their menace for ever frozen.

whisked out of a matchbox one side across my palm

with a spider's lichen touch,

like an acrobat walking on his hands (61)

Whereas Shah Nasuriddin's remains are cursed to inhabit a grave that becomes the haunt of rolling ass:

and he swung the spiked mace of his curse and cried,

'Ashes will roll on your grave !'

Stricken, the anchorite replied. (64)

Both were the men of great spiritual achievements. They know their power could be used as well abused.

The theme of love and sex occupy predominant place in 'The Unrest of Desires'. The poems 'The Night of Jackals', 'Love Among the Pines' are the finest love poems, depicting pleasure of conjugal love. Daruwalla is also dealing with the theme related to myth and rituals. In the poems like 'AagMatam', 'Sixth Moharram in Lucknow' and 'The Mazars of Amroha', one finds the poet is drawing poetic sustenance from myths, rituals, festivals and religious performances. In these poems, the theme and tone, structure and imagery interact in creating an absorbing human drama which has few parallel in India English poetry.

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