Chapter 3

Indian Society and Culture

Preliminaries

This chapter deals with the concept of Indian society and culture in Indian English poetry. The gamut of Indian English Poetry is broadly divided into two periods: pre-Independence Indian English Poetry and post-Independence Indian English Poetry. Indian society and culture is depicted in the poetry of both periods. Prof. V.K. Gokak showers praise on almost all poets whom he has included in his anthology. In Indian society the classification of the Indian poets in English is made into two groups. The first group includes the prominent poets like Toru Dutta, Madhusudan Dutta, Sorojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, whereas Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parathasarathy, Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolhatkar and the like are the most prolific post-independence poets who form the second group. They are the most brilliant commentators on the Indian scenario because politics, marriage, love, adulteration, black marketing, corruption, curfew, riots, joint family rituals, brain drains and a number social events come in for criticism in their poetry.
These poets intend to create social awareness among the people and try to make them aware of the contemporary problems. While dealing with social problems they are aggressive and their language is more attacking. Daruwalla is no exception to this. He uses irony and satire to expose socio-cultural evils; he has a social purpose to stir the social conscience of the readers. Most of the poets belong to the elite of the society and learning English and writing in English was considered a matter of prestige.

The concept of Indian society

There are thousands of communities living in India including all major religions of the world in a predominantly Hindu society with sizeable Muslim population. They speak different languages and dialects; they have their own food habits, professions, industries, handicrafts, traditions and cultural aspects. On the same line Jawaharlal Nehru too had said that Indian society being multilingual and multicultural nation had a bundle of contradictions held together by strong but invisible threads. In fact, India is a nation in which we find unity in diversity; people from different caste and creed, religion and region, beliefs and assumptions live together happily. Indians have developed common traits, thoughts and feelings. In spite of repeated foreign invasions, and the enormous growth in population, Indians have professed remarkable personality. The era of globalization and democracy of the twenty-first century are adding new features to Indian society.

The composition of society is based on classes and classes are based on monetary considerations, and the four Vernas—gradations in the society according to vocation which determined the composition of society from ages. Indian society consists of four Vernas: Brahmin, Khashtriya, Vaishya and Shudras. It also consists of many religions, languages, castes, dialects and cultural affinities with visible variations. It is also interesting to note the division of castes which is, perhaps nowhere else. Indian Society also comprises its art, languages and culture on one side
and its social, economic and political life on the other hand. Hinduism is a vast sea of rituals, customs, beliefs and thoughts of profound nature and it also has certain superstitions.

If one peeps into longest and broadest Indian mythology, one will find that there were religious thoughts prevalent among Hindus amidst foreign invasions. People were driven to eternal values, ideals and principles of Lord Rama. There were many religious movements headed by different saints during the period, right from twelfth century onwards, people had the benefit of witnessing revival of Hinduism and at the same time Muslims, Sikhs and Sufis also appeared on the scene with host of other religious saints. Their solitary purpose was to awaken the people with the message of love, harmony, non-violence, brotherhood and amity among all people and states. These saints were not only religious in outlook but they had a social message too. They were secular in outlook and carried the torch of universal love and brotherhood.

Robinson Rowena from Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay very rightly commented that Indian society was represented with respect to three variables- family, caste and village by Indian scholars in sociology and anthropology. Traditional Indian society is also considered as of the largest Hindu society as it consists of many religions, regions, languages, castes, villages, families, dialects and cultures. Indian traditional society was based on three great pillars- family, caste and village. The Vernas were divided into rigid hierarchy such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudras. The picture of Indian society was realistic, but somewhat complex and intricate.

M.N. Srinivas defined westernization as, “the change brought about in Indian society and cultures as a consequence of over One Hundred Fifty years of British rule.” (Srinivas 2) Westernization was a different way of mobility from the British rule. It was a social change that covered changes in new technology, social institutions, social ideologies and social values. In this way some castes began to accept a westernized life-style, western values of equality and individualism. During
the same period there was another way of social change available to the avarna communities and that was to adopt Christianity. The westernization changes the total Indian society and cultural scenario from One hundred and fifty years’ of British rule.

Society changes with a changing time, accepts the novel ideas sidelining the old ones. Scavenging—manual cleaning of excreta of others and physically carrying it elsewhere for disposal leading to social stigma of scavenger— is an ugly part of India’s history and society. Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause and impressed upon us the urgent need to remove this bloat from our society. Indian society was a visible synthesis between the Hindu and Muslim religions. Hindu society is a composition of heterogeneous mass of people with amazing cultural variation. The life of Indian Society, its art, language, its social, economical and political life, encompasses religious and spiritual beliefs of people in totality. Art, culture and literature are nothing but society. Literature is a mirror to the society because it reflects the changing spectrum of society.

Rowena Robinson too comments on social changes in modern India as, “Modern India is changing very rapidly and society today presents some fascinating as well as contradictory trends. One of the most important changes in India is economic change. Already during the colonial period the new means of transportation and communication and the development of cities had brought in a degree of economic and social change. People began to migrate to the cities in search of work and modern education. The barriers of caste began to break down gradually and started becoming more flexible. Children were no longer compelled to follow the occupation of their parents; they could aspire for different and better work. Such change was, indeed, revolutionary in the context of Indian society.” (https://www.ufmg.br)

Many changes also began to discern on Indian Platform. The social and reformatory change in Bengal is one of the off shoots of national consciousness. The English education and western society made Bengalis keenly conscious of the
retrogressive effects of the superstitious customs that were prevalent in the society. The mighty reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Derozio and Vidyasagar brought about drastic changes in social customs. The efforts at social reforms always involved religious reforms. The enlightened Hindus became aware that only such a reformation in religion should bring real programs to Indian society.

The Place of Women in the Indian Society

The place of women in the Indian society is discriminative; at one hand we revere woman as a goddess and a thing of amusement on the other hand. Daruwalla depicts the miserable and pitiable condition of a woman in the poem, 'Monologue in the Chambal Valley' (*Under Orion*) here an incident of a girl and a woman trafficking is put forth. Women are bought and sold like cattle in the open market. This shows women exploitation by treating them like commodities for profit. In the poem 'Monologue in the Chambal Valley', the bandit chief recalls women in the market thus:

...taut- breasted ones from the hill
brown ones from Bihar- soft and overripe
daughter of the desert
daughters of the forest tribe?
And where did we not sell them?
In holy fairs, in cattle markets
to old men- girls younger than their daughters
to the young- one–eyed and the lame who couldn’t
get a wife
You remember the ones from Kulu, wire-thin and
catty a night I lay with her, and next day
when the buyer came, the shindy she kicked!

(*Under Orion* 48)
In today’s age of globalization in the so called advanced India despite of various rules and regulations in favor of women they are ill treated. Girls are not secure, they are being kidnapped, molested and are bought and sold ruthlessly. The bandit chief gives details about the sources of his trafficking and forest tribes. However, this practice is seen in most parts of the world as women from different parts of the world are bought and sold and trafficked to other countries. The poet attacks on the cruelty and the insensitive nature of man in the poem, ‘Monologue in the Chambal Valley’:

clinging to me with her nails and her teeth
as if we were married for over twenty years!

( Under Orion 48)

The above lines very rightly present the pathetic condition of women who are considered mere object to satisfy the carnal desire of the male. In addition to this, the victims are forced to work as sex workers undergoing severe exploitation after being trafficked in “holy fairs” and “cattle markets.” Such trafficking demonstrates females with their miseries. Daruwalla suggests how through such social evils women are deprived of their essential rights like education and dignity, security and privacy, health, and hygiene.

A miserable condition of a widow is depicted in the poem ‘Of Interiors.’ The poet presents the dark side of a woman, belonging to the Islamic community. Her identity is described as:

For she is black-clowned
And black robed and net –veiled

( Night River 42)
Woman in Islamic community is veiled by net, an act of obedience and modesty. This concept of veil is deeply rooted in religious faith, where the Islamic society considers it as a form of cultural identity, modesty and religious faith. Thus the status of women in Islamic community is not free.

Daruwalla comments on the place and status of woman in the family. The poet also comments on dowry and the status of woman in the family. He describes an incident of married in the poem, ‘On the Contrariness of Dreams’:

Our daughter is returning to her in-laws now
the way we return to our lord
each day with our morning prayer
accepting and accepted. They had squabbled
over some small trinkets perhaps—and it is over

(The Keeper of the Dead 58)

This is a typical Indian cultural scene where we find that the girls are intolerant. They do not put up with their law relation and they decide hurriedly to return their parents. The ‘morning prayer’ has a religious connotation, just as god is approached with a notion of acceptance as well as being accepted, likewise the daughter in-law, too, returns to her new family with a hope of being accepted. The poet presents the psychological functioning of the human mind in a society. Dowry is a specific cultural norm adhered by the people of the Indian subcontinent. It is also a big social evil. In ‘On the Contrariness of Dreams’ a significant cultural practice and ideology is ensured in the male’s concept of a woman’s role and status in the family:

Women must be confined to the zenana
like quail in a wicker basket

(The Keeper of the Dead 58)
The woman referred here is from the Islamic society. This statement renders the male ideology about woman. Women are supposed to be confined in the ‘zenana’, inner apartments of a house as opposed to ‘mardana’, the outer apartments which are meant for guests and men. It is not the position or place that awakens one’s vexation, but the male prejudice as presented through the image “like quail in a wicker basket”. Quails are small gallinaceous game birds. The comparison of quails with women suggests that women are merely for man’s amusement, and once that is satisfied they should be confined to lead an impoverished life.

**Ethnographic Story: Caste, Village and Household**

There were some complexities in the real social formation such as the problems of caste, village and joint family. Field view of Indian society is more reliable than print material. Some were of the opinion that print material and field view should not be different; one should not be neglected in favour of the other. Indian caste system was really unsympathetic one. Each caste had its own place in this system of hierarchy according to the rules of purity and pollution. Occupations like leather-work and scavenging were considered deeply impure and polluting. Even food habits were also the indicators of caste. For instance non-vegetables were eaten only by the lower castes.

The structural discrimination between castes was always there because of which a higher caste was considered pure and would therefore avoid certain forms of contact with the lower castes. The people from higher caste were reluctant to eat food cooked by the lower class people and avoided sharing dining table with lower class people. Untouchability was inevitable in this system of hierarchy. The higher caste people would consider the touch or even the shadow of certain castes impure. Therefore, castes considered untouchable would have to maintain a certain physical distance from the high castes. A person was born into a caste, practiced the caste occupation, married and died in the caste and could rarely hope for change or a better
or different life. That is why untouchability needs to be banished from the structure of the Indian society. Many reformists tried their best to abolish untouchability but in vain.

With the impact of Buddhism and Jainism, certain cultural practices were acceptable in past and later on they were considered as taboo. The mobility in the ancient time included conversion to Jainism and Buddhism, the sacrifice of the world in favour of the life of a sanyasi. The drinking of liquor (soma), the offering of animal sacrifices and the eating of beef were some of the practices prevalent in the society in those days. There were some movements in favour of socio-religious reform sidelining caste.

Everything began to appear in proper order. The barter system was working smoothly. Indian villages became self-sufficient units; the requirements of the villagers were fulfilled largely within the villages and there was no need to contact with the outside world. No political event or upheaval affected the villages and people were unaware of dirty politics. Therefore, they continued to enjoy social harmony without suffering from different kinds of political fluctuations. Even Marx realized that India was a village society, its villages ‘little republics. He appreciated that the villages were largely unaware of the social change and dynamics of politics. Weekly bazaar and local markets gave chance to be together. People from neighbouring villages and, sometimes, from nearby towns as well would come together with great zeal.

Even marriage ties became links between villages. Later on the advancement of infrastructure amplified intimacy and communication between towns and villages. The railway brought remote parts of the country close by connecting villages with towns and cities. The postal system was also helpful to connect the hearts and minds together. Migration from the villages into the cities increased owing to larger
employment opportunities. Industries got established and people began to rush to cities in search of bread and butter.

These migrated workers would go back home during the busy agricultural seasons. They went back in their villages during major religious ceremonies and social gatherings like ring ceremony and marriages. Remaining family members at home in villages began to come to the city especially in search of work or in pursuit of education or to get treatment at a city hospital. In this way, the border between village and city became vague; they were intermixed; they could hardly be considered separate worlds. There was no watertight compartment between cities and villages. There was a rural-urban harmony instead of a rural-urban divide.

Srinivas M N (1988) has defined sanskritization, an important path of mobility in both traditional and more contemporary periods. It is a procedure of change in which a low Hindu caste may change its customs, rites, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high caste. It can be considered as ‘upward mobility’. It is very ironical that in recent times, people are craving for ‘downward mobility’ for reservation benefits. The age-old class system has been divided into upper class, middle class and lower class on the basis of the rich and poor classes with the advancement in science and technology.

The family being one of the cultural dimensions became one of the major subjects of Indian English Poetry. Indian English Poets endlessly explore the intricacies of family relationships. As Daruwalla has pointed out, “Perhaps this has something to do with the Strong family bonds in India” (Daruwalla xxv). A. K. Ramanujan has exploited the subject much more thoroughly than any other poet. Parents are also figured out in some of the poems of Ezekiel, de Souza, Kamala Das, Chitre and Sharat Chandra. Mahapatra also writes of his father and of himself as father.
The concept of Indian culture

The concept of Indian culture is difficult to define. India’s culture has longest history of thousands of years. It has given successive generation of India’s mind-set, a value system, and a way of life, which has been retained with remarkable continuity despite of repeated foreign invasions, and the enormous growth in population. It gives to India as well as to people of Indian origin a unique personality today, as it has done in the past and is having enduring imprints on the Indian consciousness.

India has been having a highly developed culture since long time. The achievements in the realm of literature, art, and religion before the beginning of the Christian era continued its impact on people during last 2000 years. The national pencil or the pencil of Indian culture has been extensively used during last 2000 years with sensitivity and care, and its manifestation are example of continuity and renewal, and yet no major innovation seems to be a departure from the past.

Culture is defined differently by the anthropologists, scholars and experts. Some of the definitions are given for better understanding. Taylor defines, “a culture is that complex whole’ which includes ‘knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a membrane of society” (Taylor 1).

Bose views ‘Culture’ as, “a term in anthropology which covers everything from the traditional manner in which people produce, cook, eat their food; the way in which they plan their houses and, arrange them on the surface of their land; the manner in which men are organized into communities, to the moral or religious values which are found acceptable, or the habitual methods by which satisfaction is gained in respect of the higher qualities of the mind” (Bose 15).
Kroeber holds that one can roughly approximate what culture is by saying that, “It is which the human species has and other social species lack. This would include speech, knowledge, beliefs, customs, arts and technologies” (Kroeber 253).

The term culture is more general and abstract connotation. It is a system of ultimate aims or norms of life. When we can say that culture is a sense of ultimate values possessed by a particular society as expressed in its collective institutions, it is significant form of material objects. Culture is sometimes used as just another word for civilization but civilization is a higher order of culture. Culture emerges out as a symbolic structure that gives such activities significance. Societies differ in terms of their culture. Culture is everything made, learned and shared by the member of society including values, behaviour, beliefs and material objects. Culture is the way of life for an entire society.

Franz Boas observes, “Culture may be defined as the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behaviour of individual composing a social group collectively and individually in relations to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself and of each individual to himself. It also includes the products of these activities and their role in the life of the groups. The mere enumeration of these various aspects of life, however, does not constitute culture. It is more, for its elements are not independent, they have a structure” (Boas 159).

Franz Boas refers to the complex entity of culture which is constituted of different parts. There are certain areas of the culture that relate to the matters of ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social class and gender. Culture lacks fixed boundaries that interacts and competes with one another. Culture emerges act as symbolic significance and various aspects of life.
In every society there exists a hierarchy in culture. One culture is dominant and the other is subaltern but at the same time it also gives a way to third culture called counter culture that actively opposes the dominant culture. India is multicultural nation in which existence of divorced cultures in a society leads to cultural diffusion. Culture emerges act as a prominent aspect of literary work. The contemporary, the historical and the cultural consciousness probed through the artistic composition. It not only provides the scope for examining cultural norms and values but also furnishes the personal culture that includes his / her attitude, perception, thought, mood, intention and reason.

Indian culture is one of the mile stones in the history of Indian literature. It is rich and an ancient oral tradition regarding Vedas and Upanishads. It is a perception of rationality and reason. The crisis of cultural identity is the fundamental problem in every society. In this regard, Dr. Harimohan Prasad (1983) rightly comments on Indian culture as, “Indian culture on the other hand is receptive, not recalcitrant or reactive. It has something vital and unifying that stood in good stead in the wakes of various invasions and interactions various races, languages and religion traditions. Culture is like a living organism, can sustain and progress only when it shows adaptability in full abundance. This cultural and solidarity and its assimilative potency have given our poets a stance different from that of other commonwealth poets. There is different cultural identity of Australians, Africans, Carabians in relation to Indian culture” (Prasad 4).

Abid Hussain (1978) asserts the Hindustani culture as, “The Hindustani culture had developed during the reign of Akbar and his successors were essentially bound with the Mughal Empire but its decay was slower than that of the Empire and even during the period of political disintegration it continued to be the connecting link between different cultural groups and regions” (Hussain 95-96).
The cultural life of India had the influence of western culture when the Europeans, the British traders arrived in the first century exploited the unrest in the country. There were different cultural groups and religions. The Persian language was its medium of expression; and this language was increased during this period to the new regions. The virtually independence states of the Deccan and Bengal and Oudh, Persian language was used in government offices where very large number of employees were Hindus. Naturally it was a degeneration of Hindustani culture and it has occupied a commonplace in India, but the western culture created a new influence on the Indian culture.

The Indian English Poetry from Henry Derizio to V.N. Bhushan was extensively engaged in defining cultural identity. They depicted various things regarding cultural consciousness and Search for Indian identity. The various themes created by these poets are Indian culture, Indian mysticism, social and reformatory concern, Indian nationalism and patriotism. The search for cultural identity in the cultured sphere consolidated the nation which resulted into the political freedom of India. In this regard, Abid Hussain too comments on culture as, “If we look at the cultural situation in India we find that though the old pattern of unity in diversity has preserved itself, the ground colour of unity has grown dimmer and the superficial colours of diversity become more pronounced” (Hussain 143).

Most of the people use civilization and culture in an interchangeable manner. But there is a vital difference between the two. Civilization is much bigger and may contain in its fold several cultural expression and values. Culture took root as soon as human beings transmitted or passed down knowledge both orally and materially from one generation to other. Culture, therefore, is closely related to the arts, customs, habits, belief, values, behaviour, and community life. Culture is the basic ingredients of civilization. Civilization, however, is marked by a huge social complexity and organization and includes varied economic and cultural activities. It is also characterized by refinement of thoughts, manners or tastes.
Culture and civilization have, however, a close relationship. Civilizations are actually large cultural sphere containing many nations. In short, civilization in which someone lives is that person’s broadest cultural identity. Like all human creations, civilization also experience cycle of birth, life, decline and death but the basic tenets of culture are somewhat indestructible.

India’s civilization and culture have strong roots in its geography and society. These have immensely contributed to the uniqueness of the Indian mind. The learning and conceptions of past and present that inform the Indian consciousness are manifold. Only a multi-dimensional view will facilitate better understanding.

Indian culture is the representation of diversity and unity but superficial colours of Indian diversity and culture become more pronounced. The most prominent obstacle to cultural unity is the variety of languages. There are favourable and unfavourable forces to the growth of cultural unity. There are fourteen regional languages and many more dialects belonging to different linguistic families in India. Culture is represented through the variety of languages in India. There are some linguistic barriers in different parts of India but the cultural situation in India is outstanding. The linguistic consciousness builds a cultural consciousness for Indian masses. The powerful factor for ultimate unity in India is cultural community.

It is very interesting that we find many authors mentioning India as a great and rich nation. For example, Doctor Faustus says:

I’ll have them fly to India for gold
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl  (Marlow 74)

Nevertheless, the political supremacy of the British had been established in India and western culture influenced the Indian mind. It not only influenced the ways of life, attitude, language, and culture but also the creative expression of Indian people.
Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla is one of those Indo-English poets of today who have earned recognition of their poetic worth and talent in the literary world. He seems to be distinguished in the galaxy of modern Indo-English poets. He has published more than eight volumes of poetry. His poems have been translated into many languages and his poems have occupied a place in various prestigious anthologies. He won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1984 and the coveted Common Wealth Poetry Prize for Asia in 1987. Though Daruwalla has substantially contributed to modern Indo-English poetry there are some people who were considered his poetic output as meagre.

In spite of this, Daruwalla is acclaimed by literary critics of both home and abroad. His poetry is both immediately Indian in reference and universal in its concern with love, death, domination, self-control, self-betrayal and the corruptions. There is often a Knife-edge to Daruwalla’s tone and an angry, satiric perspective hardly heard before in modern Indian poetry. His mastery of both traditional prosody and free verse makes him innovative in style and language. His language and diction are particularly vigorous and immediate. Like a true satirist he tries to do away with various evils gripping the society and the nation by bringing them to limelight. As a matter of fact, the dislocation caused by the partition, the anxiety caused by society and nature have shaped Daruwalla’s sensibility which is acutely aware of the present day socio- economical, political and cultural reality in India. Employing irony and satire as his tools he exposes corrupt politicians, malpractices in food and oil, callous police, communal, tensions, riots, immorality, callous medicine men, and corrupt priest, etc.

The discussion on the socio-cultural sensibilities and thematic concerns reveals Daruwalla’s power to discern the situation around. Of course his major thematic preoccupations and poetic vision spring from his own observations and experiences. Most of the times, his personal experiences and observations serve a
universal note. It is noticed that through his poetry his personal experiences and observations become general as well as universal. A sense of immediacy a sense of involvement can also be discerned in Daruwalla’s poetry. It has been rightly observed that Daruwalla is not a poet for readers (Anglo or Indian) who want an India transcendentalised beyond the everyday facts. Keki Daruwalla through his book, *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980* expresses his views about poetry as “Poetry is first personal but at the same time it has to be a social gesture, because on occasions I feel external reality bearing down on me from all sides with a pressure strong enough to tear my ear drums.” (21) He, then says, “Poems are rooted in landscape…(Which) is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. For him, a riot-stricken town is a landscape” (21).

**A Sense of Alienation and Search for Identity**

The Parsees, due to their small number, enjoyed a marginal position during the British Raj. So the British employed them as their agents, mediators and diplomats. The Parsees regarded English education as one of the blessings by the British on India. Westernization produced adverse results as well. It is truly ironic that the process of westernization brought about ‘double alienation.’ Though they were adequately westernized, the British never treated the Parsees as their equal. At the same time, the Parsees were alienated from the mainstream of Indian life. Though the Parsees enjoyed a marginal position in the Indian society during the British era, the influence of religion on social life was fairly strong. The World is becoming multilingual, multicultural and multiracial global village. Daruwalla throws light on the issues of rootlessness and cultural alienation. A struggle for religious identity is also present in some of the poems like ‘Through a Row of Doors:

Who was afraid of exile?
A Jew in St. Petersburg, or Moscow
was a bit of exile, anyway

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A Jew finds himself socio-culturally dislocated in Russian cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow where Christianity is the predominant practiced religion. The rootlessness and cultural alienation of a Jew is sensed from the word “exile”. Like the Parsi, the Jews are clearly a “minority.” Therefore, he considers his stay among the Christians as an exile. A kind of rootlessness, springing up from the loss of cultural ties is apparent in the poem ‘Migrations’:

Mother used to ask, don’t you remember my mother?  
You’d be in the kitchen all the time  
and run with the fries she landed out,  
still sizzling on the plate.  
Don’t you remember her at all?  

(Map Maker 48)

The guise finds it difficult to remember the face of his mother even when he is reminded of his childhood experiences. The migration has had such an impact on the guise that he has forgotten the past familial incidents. Though the person knows that his impassivity shocks the mother, he feels that “going back in time is also tough”:

Mother’s fallen face  
would fall further  
at my impassivity  

(Map Make 48)

The rootlessness is not because of migration, but because of the hampering effect the migration had over the time, for the person fails to visit his mother and the lack of communication further creates emotional distancing. He realizes “Migrating
across years is also difficult.” The sense of exile and rootlessness in ‘Nativity Poem’
denotes the feeling of rootlessness:

...I have been
living with the Philistines, and our people of the word,
worshipping Jehovah, our Lord.
But don’t ask me Mr Scribe to which of Israel’s tribes
I belong. Suffice it then
to say I am from Bethlehem.

(Map Maker 7)

Though the speaker was living among the Philistines for thirty long years, he
felt alienated. The lack of commitment even after thirty long years of stay and
acquaintance can be noticed. The speaker fails to identify to which tribe of Israel he
exactly belongs to.

In ‘Collage II: Mother,’ the protagonist says the face of his mother
(motherland) resembled a shattered mirror in which In which he could not see his
face, in other words the narrator felt that he had lost his identity as an Indian:

But mother your face was so fissured
I couldn’t see my face in it

(Collected Poems 69)

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same time, the Parsees were alienated from the mainstream of Indian life. Though the Parsees enjoyed a marginal position in the Indian society during the British era, the influence of religion on social life was fairly strong. Brotherhood of man is a cardinal doctrine of Prophet Zoroaster’s message.

This community has always been in fears and insecurities as their culture is heading towards extinction gradually. The main factors responsible for this extinction are either late marriages or decision to remain unmarried. Other reasons of their disappearance are diseases and mental illness, low birth rate and high death rate. If the same rate of birth and death rate continues, in near future, the community will disappear soon. Parsi community had to take some initiative in order to preserve their community.

Thus, one finds Daruwalla’s characters struggling with their cultural and religious identity, and exhibit diasporic rootlessness due to transmigration. Apart from the individual culture, the poets project the Indian and the world culture: the values, the norms, the rituals, practices and philosophy. However, the portrayal is not a mere objective representation, but a critique as well as an extension of his subjective outlook towards the social reality.

**Daruwalla: a Sensible Poet and Cultural Figure**

It would be worthwhile to take into consideration Daruwalla as a sensible person before studying the social sensibilities projected through his poetry. No doubt, Daruwalla seems to be a sensible person throughout his poetic works. Daruwalla’s world is that of a police officer’s but it is also the world of a thinking poet who identifies himself as Indian simply because he cannot locate himself in any of the existent localized categories, “I am neither a good Parsi - hardly ever having lived like one, not a Hindu or a Muslim. The same goes for culture - I am neither a Punjabi nor a Gujarati or a U.P. man, a bit of everything which really means nothing.” (Nabar
272) As he says in his reply to P. Lal’s questionnaire, Daruwalla “hopped across half the continent” during his years of education and his transferable job as a police officer kept him on the move later. “So this poet too constructs his location, his India. He belongs to this world and this world belongs to him unquestionably. He may thus addresses India angrily as mother “who will crawl towards Banaras to die” and call her “one vast sprawling defeat” (Collage II) he is after all the policeman whose routine is to wear “the putties left behind by the Raj” who has to walk into “a ring of abuse.”

The predicament of modern individual is shown in Daruwalla’s poem, ‘Lambling.’ The modern man lives in a modern world, where he loses all his hopes and reliability and falls victim to frustration:

I know of failing strength and fettering feet
I know I am hungry but I cannot eat
For though I am a patient
For Lamb within me has turned urgent.

(Collected Poems 198-199)

He is an estranged, isolated individual utterly sensible towards the difficulties inside the society. Society has lost its order and stability and has become chaotic and uneven in the name of modernization. It is a similar world of horror and terror, of violence and hatred like Eliot’s “Wasteland” which the poet visualizes every time. Daruwalla’s ‘Rumination’ talks on the same line:

I can smell violence in the air
like the lash of coming rain
mass hatreds drifting grey across the moon…

(Under Orion 16)
Same idea of violence and horror of his social vision are estimated in his poems with the help of animal imageries. In this aspect Daruwalla shows a heartbreaking impact of Ted Hughes’s animal poems where the poet uses animals to disclose deep emotional and intellectual strategies of the mind. Like Hughes’s ‘Hawk Roosting’, Daruwalla’s ‘Hawk’ is the symbolical expression of the raw energy and the elemental force of nature. The intimacy and affinity between the two can be well obtained:

I saw the wild hawk-king this morning
riding an ascending wind
as he drilled the sky.
But he was lost
in widening wheel
a frustrated parricide on the kill

(The Keeper of the Dead Collected Poems 151)

This similarity becomes more specific in Daruwalla’s ‘Wolf’, where the animal enters in the poet’s mind and consciousness like poetic imagination-

Black snout on sulphur body
he nudged his way
into my consciousness

(Collected Poems 196)

Both Daruwalla and Ted Hughes are not concerned with the description of animals instead they use animals to bring different significant and implied meanings.

As far as the biographical details of Daruwalla are concerned, we get some of the facts. Vrinda Nabar tries to give some of his biographical details, when she first met Daruwalla in March 1976, Daruwalla dismissed the biographical background of a
writer as unimportant, and in a letter he added by way of a post script: about the biography, "I have nothing interesting to say except that I am neither a good Parsi" (Nabar 272).

And that is why very few biographical details of the poet are available. But one thing is for sure that the poet can best be regarded as sensible person. It is because being a police officer for a long time he could observe the people around him very closely and cleverly. Daruwalla’s poetry is the result of his own interaction with the external world. The poet has profoundly described the human emotions and passions.

The most important feature of his poetry is its unique observation. There is a poetic growth in his close observation of human events and human situation. The poet beautifully combines fact and fancy myth and actuality in his poetry. Harimohan Prasad rightly remarks on his poems in these words, “The significance, relevance and power of his poetry emerge from an interaction between his subjective responses and the larger context that includes both myth and actuality. In the early poems craved out of his experiences on duty as a police officer there is an immediacy of observation and felicity of expression but they lack extensiveness of consciousness which is born out of the large deep vision. There is a gradual intensification of the environment in his poetry” (Prasad 56).

From the above extract one can say that the poet has become a sensible person because of the various situations, events and incidents the poet has undergone. Daruwalla sensed the happenings around him and composed poems about that happening them in the form of poems.

**Daruwalla’s Poetry as a Gamut of Indian Social Sensibilities**

Daruwalla is a powerful voice which expresses Indian social sensibilities and attacks social evils and short-comings pervading in contemporary Indian social,
political, religious and cultural set up. It is observed that he is intensively conscious of social sensibilities in his poetry. His poetry grows directly from the life around him. His job as a police officer provided him adequate background to observe men and matters closely: being a police officer he is aware of communal tensions, riots, exploitation, greed corruption, malpractices, bribery and the like. The poet exposes the same things through his poetry. In order to probe into preoccupations and ways of presentation, some major and important poems dealing with society and culture have been selected for the present study.

Daruwalla’s knowledge about human nature and life is enriched because of his job, experiences and observations. Consequently, he could compose poetry on the basis of any experience and incidents he came across. He stands out among Indian English poets for bringing to poetry a range of experience. Some of his experiences and observations, of active life are poetized. In the poems like ‘Curfew in a Riot Torn City’, ‘Poems from Tarai’, ‘Routine’, ‘Monologue in Chambal Valley’, ‘Ruminations’, etc. We have to consider certain situations, events where we come across the examples of social sensibilities. These situations and events are primarily seen in the selected poems in a way or the other.

Awareness of these situations and events around him seem to have led Daruwalla to write social verse. His social awareness is rightly admired by critics and scholars. His unblinking eye for epileptic woman, epidemic like cholera, communal tension, communal conflicts and human sufferings show his social sensibility. When Daruwalla writes about socially emotive themes – curfews, riots, racial violence- he writes very objectively even though he is one of the authorities to regulate curfew, riots, robbery, racial violence etc.

A vivid and picturesque description of an epileptic woman, her treatment, and her sufferings make the poet compose poem about it. The poet could not pass by without giving thought to the incident. It plainly means that he is interested to reveal social
sensibility. Daruwalla’s poem, ‘Epileptic’ describes the particular happening in such a picturesque way that readers can visualize it. The two children are so frightened that they suddenly move from her:

Suddenly the two children
flew from the side
like severed wings

(Under Orion 45)

The rickshaw – puller’s reactions and the husband’s efforts indicate the plight of the woman. Daruwalla observes the reality that the physicians are reluctant to provide medical aid, moreover they are not sure of the disease, and they logically treat. Daruwalla also presents a lively account of the dirt, fifth and rubbish for which an Indian village is known for. He sarcastically points out that ‘Bansa Mazar’ a hospital is situated in such unhealthy surrounding.

Daruwalla feels pity and compassion for the victims of misfortune. His social concern is apparent in the poem, ‘The Ghaghra in Spate’. The description of horror of flood and its devastation is depicted colourfully. Cottages of the poor are completely washed away, people take shelter on the roof tops, and rescue boats trying hard, officials are helping. All this arouses the feeling of compassion and sympathy for the suffering villagers who have lost everything in flood. The poet links the human suffering with the course of river. The poet seems to believe in the presentation of various aspects of nature and her relationship with human world simultaneously.

Communal tension resulting in violence and suffering has been brought forth in the poem, ‘Ruminations’. The poet anticipates the outbreak of violence, caused by mutual hatred:

I can smell violence in the air
like the lash of coming rain
mass hatred drifting grey across the moon.

(Under Orion 16)

The outbreak of violence would result in the death of countless innocent persons, destruction of property, sufferings of the poor, chaos and disorder. Then, the poet realistically describes the mortuary where the dead bodies are kept for post-mortem and identification. The condition of mortuary is really bad—rotting and disgusting. The entire situation is gloomy. Then rain refreshes everything except the poet. Unfortunately the poet cannot experience such a refreshing and rejuvenating feeling, in the poem, 'Ruminations':

I cannot find it.
I have misplaced it somewhere
in the caverns of my past

(Under Orion 17)

The poet here depicts his own state of mind. Had he not been sensible, he would not have sensed and anticipated the entire event.

The similar communal violence is depicted artistically in the poem 'Curfew in Riot Torn City'. This poem reveals the inside story of any riot - its insanity, its animality, and finally its futility:

Blood and fog
are over half the town
and curfew stamps across the empty street.

(Under Orion 41)
The city is disturbed by communal violence. The poet shows how people are in a constant fear and how blood thirsty people are enjoying this:

barracuda eyes
searching for prey (Under Orion 41)

Actually communal divide and communal riots have always been a part of Indian history. Communal tension on a trivial matter is described in the poem, ‘Death by Burial’. Unitedly the villagers catch the bandits, decide to kill them, but disagree on their punishment. The poet masterly shows the communal break up between the Hindus and the Muslims in the village. The villagers go to such extent that a communal riot breaks out:

half the village could be Hindu, half Muslim
Enough cause for a riot.
with half the village shouting
‘death by Fire!’
and the other half ‘death by burial!’

(Under Orion 80)

Daruwalla, like a social reformer throws light on the devastating epidemics like plague and cholera, at the same time he exposes the failure of the physicians and medicine men who fail to diagnose. Daruwalla displays the realistic picture of human sufferings in the poem, ‘Pestilence’ perhaps he might have gone through the pangs of death and disease. The loss of human life is so great that people start migrating from the villages. Even the muscles of the shoulders of ‘palanquin bearers’, who carry dead bodies, have become as smooth as river stones:

brown shoulders black shoulders
shoulders round as orbs
muscles smooth as river stones glisten
till a dry wind scourges
the sweat from off their backs

(Under Orion 43)

The poet is not only aware of the social problem like epidemic but he also wishes to correct the medicine men who are reluctant to provide medical aid and who are not able to identify whether the epidemic is of cholera or plague. The physicians and the nurses are callous and indifferent towards the people afflicted with this deadly disease. He attacks on them and cleverly shows how these doctors and nurses are trying to avoid their duties:

who says they have cholera?
they are down with diarrhea
who says it is cholera
It is gastro – enteritis
who says they have cholera?

(Under Orion 44)

Like ‘The Epileptic’, ‘Pestilence’ is also noteworthy for its realism and lively picture of human sorrow and suffering and also a very lively picture of health and hygiene. Daruwalla is aware of communal disparity; he observed it through his profession and poetized it. It means Daruwalla senses the social disorder, and social evils; he exposes them through his poetry and perhaps wants to correct the situation.

Daruwalla’s deep anguish at the institutionalized corruption, malpractice bribery and administrative and political decay finds expression in the poems like ‘Graft,’ ‘Monologue in Chambal Valley’, ‘Hawk,’ ‘Collage I’ and ‘Collage II: Mother’ etc.
Daruwalla senses the corruption fast spreading out in all walks of life. He highlights the social corruption, religious corruption, corruption in law and justice etc. ‘Graft’, a beautiful poem shows how adulteration has gone beyond control in the society:

You may adulterate oils, make tablets out of chalk    
sell meat turning maggoty, fish turning stale    
switch sawdust for jute and at worst of times    
the right buck at the right time tips the scales.

(Under Orion 71)

Corrupt people think with the help of money anything can be easily changed and manipulated:

To legalize a bastard you have to bribe the priest.    
The catechism also has its price    
he'll wed you to turk or Rubbis daughter.    
Even though you may be uncircumcised.

(Under Orion 71)

In the above lines we see that corruption corrupts even the morals of Indian society. If you bribe the priest, even bastard can be legalized. You may marry Jewish daughter even though you are not able to enjoy sex. Daruwalla experienced such a degradation of morals and ethics of Indian society. He has gone through such an experience. A Sikh dealer “in cars and motorbikes” takes him to five star hotels. Hence it can be repeated that his poetry directly stems from his experiences and observation. Even so called decent people are not free from corruption. It is so deep rooted in human nature that it is unchangeable like one’s palm lines:

and hands don’t flame when they accept the bribe
palm lines are impervious to change.

(Under Orion 71)

The poet wishes to correct the prevalent corrupt situation by criticizing but in vain. It is still flourishing. Daruwalla in his poem, ‘Collage II: Mother’ points out that all flesh is subject to corruption; and flesh of even living human beings in this country has begun to decompose so that it has begun to smell of decay and corruption.

In court, illegal things are turned into legal with the help of bribery; corruption has reached in every field. Police department (Poet belongs to the same) is no exception to this. Policemen fight to save their skin. That is why it is regretfully asked who will keep an eye on the watchman. Another field which plays very vital role in health and hygiene is also excavated. Medicines are not properly made; medicine men are not well qualified. Moreover they are callous. All these horrible things are daringly highlighted by the poet.

Daruwalla mocks at the bragging politicians who claim the progress India has achieved in recent times through, ‘Collage’. The poet sarcastically observes:

Who says we have done nothing?
We have abolished zamindari
and liquor and English
and driven out the whores from the G.P. Road

(Under Orion 67)

These politicians’ claims are false and misleading. Ban on liquor, for instance, is on paper. Prostitute may be driven out of certain pockets of the city but they would then disperse over all the localities of the city. And you know that the prostitution has been very polishly and cleverly carried out through polished area, women from well
to-do families, college going girls and some victimized are there in this leather-currency.

These are not the only achievements of Indian people. They are also quite generous to liberate the prisoners who have committed robberies and rapes. And this is ironical that they are liberated on the eve of republic day (26th January) as mark of national rejoicing.

Freeing robbers and rapists
On Republic Day. (Under Orion 67)

The poet ruthlessly exposes democracy and democratic system as it is usurped. Corruption has been institutionalized. Prices of essential commodities are soaring day by day. At first prices are hiked incredibly, then there is strike, agitation, then prices are reduced to some extent to solace the common people. This has been a part of the game here in India for years together. Governments change, leaders change, policies change but change does not appear in its real sense. To Daruwalla India is so corrupt a country that if plague were to break out and if the medical researchers needed rats for experiment the rats would begin to be sold at high prices in the black market. His poem, ‘Collage’ describes:

If we had plague
Camus - style
and doctors searched for the virus and vaccine
there would be black market in rats.

(Under Orion 68)

Daruwalla’s attitude towards India and her malpractices is unsurprisingly sentimental and daringly realistic. Bruce King observes, “Control represses desire but
is necessary for survival in an India which is dangerous and in which the individual’s life is threatened by society and by nature” (King Bruce 123).

The evils of corruption, poverty, exploitation, ill health, starvation, collapse of administration and decay in political set up have been exposed in the poem, ‘College II: Mother’. Mother in the poem means mother India or motherland. This poem is a kind of ode to motherland. The poet addresses to his mother land as if she could listen to him. The mother land is shading tears because of drought; corruption pervades everywhere and there is no escape from it. The poet says with deep anguish:

Corruption is the chemistry of flesh
No wonder the sense suppurate passion putrefy.

(Under Orion 68)

The definitional metaphor has been used to explore corruption. In the present political set up leaders are only interested in feathering their own nests.

A very moving picture of the reign of anarchy, exploitation, subversion of democratic and constitutional norms in the world especially in India have been depicted in the poem Hawk. The hawk is the symbol of rebellion against the unjust social and political order. According to hawk, man is responsible for the chaos, disorder, mismanagement and exploitation in the world. His anger bursts forth against the institutionalized corruption, exploitation and tyranny. It was his ambition to establish an egalitarian order. Restlessly he moves higher and higher for an ideal order. Actually hawk is a mouthpiece of the poet. The poet also wants to set the things in order. His social sensibility is quite discernible in this context.

Daruwalla’s anger and resentment at the pervading corruption at all levels in government have been verbalized in the poem, ‘Monologue in a Chambal Valley’. He presents mockingly how money subverts justice in India.
Economic disparity, injustice and exploitation give birth to robbers and bandits. Indeed all of them are white choler criminals who thrive on corruption and bribery. The poet throws light on the association between bandits, smugglers, brothel owners and government officials. He also shows how the association leads to material prosperity. The poet describes material prosperity through the mouth of bandit chief:

You too have done well, I notice
The mud in your house has changed to sandstone,
the window thatched with khas.

(Under Orion 49)

The imitative nature of Indian culture is also criticized. Indians are westernized; they imitate British food habits, fashions, and ways of life, music, dance and everything except their work culture.

It is quite paradoxical that Ravi Shankar, the great musician is surrounded by the exponents of “rock and roll” modern dance. Beatles, a group of musicians surround both Ravi Shankar and Maharshi Mahesh, the founder of transcendental meditation. There is no rhyme and rhythm, melodious and ear-soothing voice in beatles. These idiots can learn a lot from Indian ragas. Daruwalla satirises modern dance in his poem, ‘Collage I’:

Rock’n rollers around Ravi Shankar
mods around Maharshi Mahesh
and beatles around both
and we are thrilled
They have a lot to learn
from the ragas still, these bums!

(Under Orion 67)
Madhusudan Prasad is of the opinion that “on the contemporary landscape of Indian English poetry, Daruwalla stands as a class by himself, for all the living Indian English poets, he is the only one who evinces a sensibility committed to present day socio-political and cultural reality. As far social criticism, he indisputably scores over other fellow poets such as Arvind Krishna Mehotra, Jayant Mahapatra A.K. Ramanujan and Nissim Ezekiel…” (Prasad 62)

By and large, the poet of social awareness is exposed to certain problems; Daruwalla also experienced and observed a lot of social evils and problems and verbalized the same in his poetry. Slavery, poverty and beggary are delineated in the poems like, ‘The Revolt of the Salt Slaves’, ‘The Beggar’, ‘Railroad Reveries’ and ‘Vignette I.’

Daruwalla was inspired to write ‘The Revolt of the Salt-Slaves’, after reading, *Exile and the Kingdom* a collection of short stories by the French existentialist, Albert Comus (1913-60). Comus depicts the political decay of the present century. So also Daruwalla gives an account of a revolt by slaves working in a salt mine. In this poem, both the slaves and their masters were black Negroes. The only white thing was the sunlight and the salt slaves are ill-treated whipped by their masters. Then there is revolt against the cruel masters. This situation reminds us of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Daruwalla observes the economic disparity, injustice and slavery in relation between salt slaves and their supervisors. What is more striking is that poverty and slavery are still there in so called free India.

In ‘The Beggar’ and ‘The Railroad Reveries’ Daruwalla depicts beggary with its characteristics. The Poet minutely notes the features of the beggar. We see beggars here and there but never give a thought to them but Daruwalla has written poems on beggars. The beggar in the poem is unchanged with his features. Even if one beggar dies, another beggar would take his place. It means beggary and poverty is a permanent phenomenon in Indian society. The poet bitterly criticizes that though we
are bragging the advancement of India in twenty first century, poverty does not lose its hold.

Being a highly sensible person, Daruwalla compares himself with sleepless person in railway compartment in train journey. The poet gives minute details of a shivering girl and wailing beggars. He was moved by this pathetic condition of the girl and wailing beggars. One can notice the poet’s enormous capacity of observation and expression when he depicts a bitch and a blind boy begging on railway platform. ‘The Railroad Reveries’ has a psychological interest and stream of consciousness is apparent. The poet goes on narrating whatever confronts him.

Daruwalla’s ‘Vignette Poems’ reflects the paradoxes; on one hand there is filth in Varanasi, on the other hand there are rituals of the priest. The greedy pandas contrasts with the religious belief of people in authority and the brothels provide an ironic counterpart to religious faith in charity. In ‘vignette I’ the poet says:

The Ganga flows swollen with hymns.
Lepers huddle along the causeways

(Crossing of Rivers 100)

In the first line, Ganga flows with prayers and in the very next line the poet gives realistic picture of lepers and later in the poem beggars hoists their deformities. The Ganga is a symbol of purity and continuity even Pandit Nehru in his ‘will and testament’ felt the presence of the river as a link between past, present and future. On the same lines Daruwalla says:

The river is a voice
in the desert of human lives

(Vignette I: Crossing of Rivers 100)
The irony in the closing lines of the poem, ‘Vignette II’ is really noteworthy. Ganga, though flowing through India, does not offer any relief to the misery of the people but brings it into light:

The Ganga flows through the land
not to lighten the misery
but to show it

(Crossing of Rivers 100)

Though the sacred river, Ganga is supposed liberate people from sin, it neither offers any relief to the misery of the people nor liberate people from sin.

The same speaking river, which gives sustenance, love and solace to the suffering of mankind, becomes silent in ‘Vignette II’. She seems to be callous to the problems of people:

Only the river doesn’t speak here.
She is thought itself,
a soundless interior monologue.

(Crossing of Rivers 101)

The poem is full of Hindu rituals like pinddan, the visit of panchtirth, incantation of mantras etc. The poet attacks on the ugliness and deformities on the bank of the river, Ganga.

The theme of poverty, hunger, beggary, misery and lovelessness is extended even in ‘Vignette II’. On the same lines the sickening atmosphere of the city, caused by dirt and water pollution is depicted in ‘River Silt’.

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In ‘Evangelical Eva’ the sacrifice of all worldly pleasures and offering entire life to the children of Evangelical Eva are observed and sensed by the poet. People directly or indirectly insist her to marry and enjoy worldly pleasures. Indian sensibility is expressed through their thinking. In the eyes of Indians getting married and settling down in life is important rather than the really important social deed the missionary Eva was doing.

The typical Indian hypocrisy and crookedness of the people and their leaders are satirized in the poem, ‘The People’, Daruwalla says that people pose their dual personality; sometimes they admire their leaders. This fickle-mindedness and hypocritical nature of the people is brought into notice by the poet.

Daruwalla is sensible not only to the social problems but also to the universal truth like death and nature. If we wade through his poetry, we have many examples to elaborate the point. M. Sivaramkrishna observes, “death remains a continuing centre of consciousness for the poet.” (Sivaramkrishna 142) Daruwalla’s obsession with death is seen through poems like – ‘Ruminations’, ‘Death by Burial’, ‘Routine,’ ‘Fire Hymn’, ‘Crossing of Rivers’, ‘Boat Ride Along the Ganga’, ‘Death of Bird’, ‘The Professor Condoles’, etc.

‘Death of a Bird’ reminds us S.T. Coleridge’s, ‘The Rime of Ancient Mariner’. Both the poems poignantly express the violent conventions which disturb nature’s tranquility and sublimity particularly when some are after the lives of innocent creatures – albatross in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and the monal in ‘Death of a Bird’. ‘The Professor Condoles’ brings out the story of the death of a boy in accident. Daruwalla makes the difference between pathos and tragedy. He acknowledges tragedy as the result of life-time deeds and it is not sudden while pathos caused by unknown and unexpected accident. Harimohan Prasad appreciates the poet’s presentation of the difference between the tragedy and accident, “The poem also spells out the difference between the concepts of tragedy in the past and in the
contemporary context. From its universal range, it has narrowed down to a private, insular occurrence.” (Prasad 105)

Daruwalla’s poetry is not merely the recording of apathy; he also seems to engage with religions (Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism) and their practices as well. We see Daruwalla’s Zoroastrian love and beliefs in the poem like ‘Fire Hymn’; his observance of missionary Eva in, ‘Evangelical Eva’; his study on attitudes of Hindus and Muslims in Death By Burial’. Crossing of Rivers may be called the poetry of burning ghat but one notices Daruwalla’s disbelief in rituals in his Crossing of Rivers in general and Vignette Poems in particular. His Crossing of Rivers is a wonderful collection of poems on the Ganga and on Banaras. Daruwalla shows remarkable development in concision and concentration in the syntax and aesthetic elegance in presentation.

The poetry of Daruwalla not only shows the social sensibilities through social evils and problems but also through love, life and sex. ‘The Unrest of Desire’ reveals that man’s craving for physical union cannot be suppressed. Commenting on this inevitable and natural physical phenomenon and biological instinct, the poet writes:

However you bury the shadow in the heart
under slabs of concrete and a coil of bone,
however you wall the cave- impulse at the mouth,
it will hammer at the sides and break free,
however you bury the shadow in the heart.

(The Keeper of the Dead 174)

Sex is natural instinct and it leads to intimacy and warmth of relationship and ultimately to love. Like John Donne, he believes in carnal love which transcends you to metaphysical world. Crossing of Rivers is a serious and thoughtful display on the theme of love. During crossing, the youth falls in love with fisher girl. ‘Death of a
Bird’ is also a poignant love poem expressing intense and self-effacing love between two monals who mated, clawed and screamed. ‘To my Daughter Rookzain’ relates with life (birth), growth and development of a baby.

Thus, Daruwalla’s thematic variety is permeated with Indianness. Whatever he writes about has an inherent presentation of Indian sensibility. Man is a social animal. One cannot separate man from society; they are interrelated and interconnected; man cannot survive without society and society cannot exist without human beings. On this ground Daruwalla is really a social animal who does not seem to ignore anything around him.

**Socio-Cultural Superstructures: Myths and Facts**

Some of Daruwalla’s poems highlight the socio-cultural ideologies in which we can figure out the so-called superstructures. These superstructures continue the supremacy of the older generation over the new. In ‘the son speaks to the dead rake’ the speaker is a young man who suffers from identity-crisis that is created by the socio-cultural myths of the previous generation. The speaker contrasts the life of his father with his own and points out the Indian trend of old age reclusion to austerity in ‘The Son Speaks to the Dead Rake.’ This poem depicts a dialogue between a son and his diseased father. There is a difference of ideas between the two on a particular issue. The son regrets and agonizingly cries:

> What a life! In your youth the pleasure of the flesh.  
> In your old age the obsolete joys of heaven.

*(The Keeper of the Dead 46)*

The above lines give very contradictory picture of a father who celebrated his youth with “the pleasures of flesh” by gratifying the physical desires but after realizing the concept of heavenly pleasures, he takes joys of heaven in his old age.
The next generation is advised to believe, and hold on to the ideologies, values, and principles of the ideal society. Presenting the modern man torn between doubt and belief, lust and guilt, and artificial and natural the poet bitterly remarks:

While we oscillate between the fires of lust and guilt
seeking our refuge in those air-tight,
air conditioned pharmacies of the heart
where the antidotes to guilt are built prepared.

(The Keeper of the Dead 46)

The modern man is oscillated between the carnal desires and the guilt thereby. The man is cohered between the two, the libido, and the super-ego or the social construct. The notion of "guilt" is not real in the society. However, such restrictions fail to eradicate the protagonist's libido. Instead, the super-ego in the form of guilt prevents the protagonist from gratifying his Id. The image of heart being pharmacies that are "air-tight", "air-conditioned" depicts that emotions are so oppressed by the society that even air cannot pass through it.

The poet depicts the ideologies of the society that considers lust to be uncivilized and therefore, creates values to check the growing libido. Even the place of women in the Indian society is of double standard; at one hand we revere woman as a goddess and on the other hand we consider her a thing of amusement. Thus the ideology is divorced from reality.

Conclusion

Indian English poets are the most brilliant commentators on the Indian scenario because politics, marriage, love, adulteration, black marketing, corruption, curfew, riots, joint family rituals, brain drains and number social events come in for criticism in their poetry. They intend to create social awareness among the people and to make
them alive to the problems of the day. When they deal with social problems they are aggressive and their language is attacking. Daruwalla is no exception to this. He uses irony and satire to expose socio-cultural evils. The place of women in the Indian society is discriminative; at one hand we revere woman as a goddess and a thing of amusement on the other hand. Daruwalla depicts the miserable and pitiable condition of woman in his poetry.

Indian society consists of four Vernas: Brahmin, Khashtriya, Vaishya and Shudras. It also consists of many religions, languages, castes, dialects and cultural affinities with visible variations. Indian culture is one of the mile stones in the history of Indian literature. It is rich and an ancient oral tradition regarding Vedas and Upanishads. It is a perception of rationality and reason. The crisis of cultural identity is the fundamental problem in every society.

Daruwalla is a powerful voice which expresses Indian social sensibilities and attacks on social evils and short-comings pervading in contemporary Indian social, political, religious and cultural set up. The poet artistically links the human suffering with the course of river. The poet describes the details of the devastation caused by the river. ‘The Ghaghra in Spate’ is a realistic picture of the human suffering and Nature is indifferent towards human suffering and misery. While on duty as a police officer he experienced a happening and wrote down realistic picture in the poem, ‘Death by Burial’. He narrates how as group of people smoke ganja stealthily because smoking ganja is prohibited. This illegal activity was ignored by common people but how could a police officer like Daruwalla ignore this? The poet narrates the sensitive picture of raping daughters-in-law, snatching away the earrings of women, and torturing the old woman.

Though Daruwalla was a police officer he does not spare even the callous police and their inactive approach. He lashes against the police department in the poem ‘Curfew – in a Riot Torn City’. He also shows how the corruption has become so common in Indian society in the poem ‘Graft’. Daruwalla also presents mockingly
how money subverts justice in India. To Daruwalla, Government officials are more criminal than the records illustrate. By giving bribe even a bastard can be legalized. It seems that corruption has reached in almost all walks of life from police department to religious authority.

Daruwalla throws light on slavery through the poem, ‘The Revolt of the Salt – Slaves’. Workers are ill-treated, mostly whipped by the slave drivers and their masters in so-called Independent India. Classical music as well as values has been sidetracked giving way to new and modern music and ways of behaviour. This has been artistically depicted in the poem, ‘Collage I’: Daruwalla also attacks hypocrite politician who claim progress.