



# THE POETRY OF KEKI N. DARUWALLA IN THE LIGHT OF ECO CRITICISM

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## ABSTRACT

*Environment is a term which has considerable significance at everywhere right from ancient days to till now. But, People, over time, became more and more selfish and started exploiting natural objects to satisfy their selfish ends. Gradually, its adverse consequences started appearing. Later on, conscious people commenced brooding on nature and its conservation. Hence, several conventions like United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity, Earth Summit (Rio Conference), Kyoto Protocol, Conference of Parties etc. came into beings to draw the attention of preoccupied critics cum thinkers towards the said burning issue. Eco criticism, therefore, came into the field of literature. Keki N. Daruwalla being an IPS officer paid heed on the protection of physical environment in his works. His contribution in the field of nature study is being thoroughly discussed in this research paper.*

**Key Words:** *Eco criticism, Environment, Indian Poetry, Living Organisms, Nature, Natural objects and so on.*

## INTRODUCTION

“Nature is all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people or (often Nature) [v] the way that things happen in the physical world when it is not controlled by people (1016)” as *New Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines. This study is all about nature and its objects like grassland, river, mountain, lake and other water bodies, animals and all living organisms and about their protection too.

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Eco-criticism, recently, came into being to define the consciousness of literary giants about physical environment. Though this awareness is already present in literary texts, yet the preoccupied critics heed on this issue after mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Works like Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1973) propounded the very theme of environmental awareness. Joseph Meeker's contribution is also notable as he coined the term 'literary ecology' in his seminal work *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1979). Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) is another notable work in this respect. Ecocriticism became a common term for intelligentsia in the 1990 with the establishment of "Association for the study of Literature and Environment" (ASLE) in 1992 and of its own journal, entitled 'Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment' (ISLE) in 1993. After it, a number of works on environment came into being. Jonathan Bate's *Romantic ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Louise Westling's *The Green Breast of the New World* (1996), Bate's *Song of the Earth* (2000), Laurence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) are notable works in this area. Also, Barbara Adam's *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazard's* (1998), Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1989), and some others provide sufficient potency and popularity to ecological study.

Greg Garrard, another noted ecocritic, looks at the political and cultural aspects of this term as he observes in his book entitled *Ecocriticism* that:

*Ecocriticism is then, an avowedly political mode of analysis, as the comparison with feminism and Marxism suggests. Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns. (3)*

Richard Kerride, another noted critic, writes about the works of eco-critics in his seminal essay entitled 'Environmentalism and Eco criticism' in *Literary Theory and Criticism* edited by Patricia Waugh:

*Eco critics analyze the history of concepts such or 'nature', in an attempt to understanding the cultural developments that have led to the present global ecological crisis. Direct representation of environmental damage or political struggle are of obvious interest to eco critics, but so is the whole array of cultural and daily life, for what it reveals about implicit attitudes that have environmental consequences. (530)*

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Environmental consciousness is a unique feature of the English poetry. We may see, for instance, the immense longing for natural objects right from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Prologue to Canterbury Tales* to modern poetry. Langland's *Piers Plowman* and several mystery, miracle and morality plays sufficiently portray nature. During the Renaissance period, the works of Wyatt and Surrey introduced vitality and virility in their ecological writing Edmund Spenser popularized the term 'pastoral' in English and his works like *Faerie Queene* and *Shepherds Calender* contained eco-consciousness to a large extent. Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1581-84) is a long pastoral romance, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, *Sonnets* are notable for environmental studies. John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* and Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* have also an explicit concern with nature.

Nature seems to be all in all in the poetry of William Wordsworth his poem 'Tables Turned' (Poetry foundation, Internet) exhibits the idea of deep ecology as follows:

*One impulse from the vernal wood  
May teach you more of man  
of common evil and of good.  
Than all the sages can. (lines 21-24)*

Like Wordsworth, the other Romantics and Victorian and Modern poets paid considerable heed to nature and its conservation.

Nature also plays a crucial role in American literature and the works of Emerson (*Nature* 1836), Margaret Fuller (*Summer on the Lakes* 1843), Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*), Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman, and many others are the fine evidence of it. Indian English Writers like Derozio, Toru Dutt, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojni Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, A.K. Ramanujan, Keki N. Daruwalla, A.N. Dwivedi etc. also deal with the theme of nature.

Indians take a serious interest in nature as they look upon as their mother and adore it like a goddess. In ancient days, they used to perform ritual (Yagya) which produced the smoke and purified the wind. Indians have ever believed in the concept of 'deep ecology'; they generally worship mountain (*Sapt parvat*), river (*Sapt nadi*) and other natural objects. Kalidas presents his deep concern with nature in shloka number nine of chapter four when hermit Karvna says to the trees and plants of his monastery:

*Patum na parthamam vyavasyati jalam, yusmatu peeteshu ya  
Na datte priya mandanapi bhavitam snehen ya pallavam*

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*Adye va kusum prasuti samaye yasyah bhavati utsvah  
Seyam yati shakuntala patigriham sarviah ranugyantam. (4/9)*

(That is, who does not take water without irrigating you, who does not pluck your flowers, leaves despite her immense longing for it, who celebrates at your budding time, that very Shakuntala is going to her father-in-law's house, please give your consent at her departure, my own translation).

Keki N. Daruwala is another 'new' poet of great repute who also pays attention to nature and its objects both categorically and characteristically. His poetry describes the physical environment and reveals the poet's longing for nature. Daruwala is quoted as saying, "I am not an urban writer and my poems are rooted in the rural landscapes. My poetry is earthy..." (12).

In his poem 'Under Orion' (cited from his *Collected Poems*), Daruwala magnificently describes natural objects and thereby betrays his eco-consciousness. Here he writes thus:

*All you'll find is a rootless, dreamless drift  
the wheezing words of the saw  
as lumberjack go  
serrating through the wood  
the river dying amongst not boulders  
wind in the pines reminiscent of surf  
dog howls from the nearest village  
and cicada monotonous. (73)*

The poet draws our attention to the degradation of nature and its consequences in the above-mentioned lines, almost in a Wordsworthian fashion.

'The Ghaghra in Spate' is a poem which presents the situation of flood just like Ramanujan's poem 'A River'. Here the poet depicts the destruction caused by the floods of the Ghaghra river. Actually, dams and the obstructions in the river-flow are very dangerous. People do this work for their little profit, but they don't pay heed to the outcome of it. This poem shows that we would not play a foul game with nature and its objects, otherwise we have to pay the price of it. Nature is the best companion of mankind, but if the balance between nature and man is disturbed, it generates pollution and degradation. The poem 'The Ghaghra in Spate' (C.P.) teaches a new lesson to mankind and makes the conscious of the relevance of nature. It also draws our attention to the conservation of natural objects which rescues the apocalypse:

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*But it's when the recedes  
that the Ghaghra turns bitchy  
sucking with animal-heat  
cross-eddies diving like frogmen  
and sawing away the waterfront  
in a paranoid frenzy.(80)*

Daruwala reveals his minute observation of air pollution which is created by pyres in his poem 'Boat-ride Along the Ganga' (C.P.). In this poem, the poet writes thus:

*... and once more the pyres; against a mahogany sky  
the flames look like a hedge of spear blades  
heated red for a ritual that bodes no good.  
The mourners are a cave painting, primitive, grotesque  
done with charred wood. (98)*

Daruwalla's consciousness of nature is apparent in his poem 'Suddenly the Tree' (C.P.) in which he pays heed to some objects of nature like trees and animals and thereby shows his deep ecological sensibility. He writes thus:

*The bees roamed the house,  
too bewildered to sting the children.  
At night they slept, clinging  
to the tree fork, now scarred with burns.  
sparrows and squirrels, a bird  
with a black crest and a red half-moon  
for an eyelid bickered over  
the waxed remains next day. (130)*

The poet again deals with a ferocious bird in his poem 'Hawk' (C.P.). Hawk is a bird of prey, but its relevance is also evident in its functions- it consumes dead bodies of animals and plays a crucial role in the conservation of nature. The poet describes this bird as follows:

*Looking up into the well of the sky  
I saw the hawk, riding an ascending wind,  
as he drilled the sky.  
The land beneath him was filmed with salt;  
grass-seed, insect, bird*

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*nothing could thrive here. (151)*

'The Night of the Jackals' (C.P.) is a poem which manifests the poet's longing for other living organisms. Jackal is actually an animal of cowardly nature and in the third section of poem, the poet mentions 'Coriander leaf', and in the sections four and five he describes the seemul tree :

*'When the seemul tree  
flowers with embers  
that's the time the cough gets me.  
It's the flower-dust, I think. (170)*

The poet's strong love of physical environment is noteworthy in the poem 'Love among the Pines' (C.P.) because he directly deals with the theme of nature here. He writes thus:

*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.(171)*

The swirling 'thought' of the reader/spectator is vented here through natural images.

In 'Gulzaman's Son' (C.P.) Daruwalla depicts the longing of Gulzaman for a lamb and thereby expresses the relationship between man and nature. Gulzaman holds that lamb is his own son, and this is a climax of the affection of man for an animal. This poem, therefore, shows the poet to be a perfect environmentalist. He concludes the poem as follows:

*It cannot die of a chill in the stomach  
Either the doorway has been cleared, or clouds  
have been parted for an instant by the sun  
Gulzaman picks the dun-coloured lamb and holds  
it to his chest- 'This', he says, 'this is my son'. (196)*

Daruwalla's poem called 'Requiem for a Hawk' once again shows his deep love of natural objects. The poem starts with a news report thus:

*According to a report, the discovery of a rock-fossil of a hawk has  
considerably intrigued both geologists and ornithologists. A well*

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*known bird watcher disclosed that the sea coast where the fossil was found was at least a hundred miles away from 'hawk country'. (200)*

The entire passage contains the report 'a rock-fossil of a hawk'

'Chinar' (C.P.) is a poem in which the poet concentrates explicitly on the physical environment and describes the tree 'Chinar', whose scientific name is 'Platanus orientalis plane'. This tree is known for its length (almost 30 meters). The poet presents his ecological longing in the following lines:

*The Chinar confronts the sunset  
with its own dusk  
You can hear the drip of crinkled leaf.  
Isn't this what they call dry rain. (206)*

Poet's longing for the earth comes out vividly another section named 'Varsha' (C.P.). Daruwalla describes agriculture and harvest in this poem thus:

*They are all there,  
the paddy-straw covered by a cotton rug  
the white smoke-tendrils  
uncoiling from an incense-stick  
the air outside sharp with drizzle  
the night sharp with the moorhen's joyous cries.  
Only may flank is empty,  
only she isn't there. (212)*

'Bird eclipse'(C.P.) is another poem which clearly exhibits man-nature relationship. Here, the poet presents natural objects which help human beings very much. It shows importance of birds as creatures of nature. The poet writes about it as follows:

*Birds know an eclipse from a cloud,  
we've all learnt that,  
when moisture shades the sun.  
they don't turn silent.  
In fact bird-calls seem to trigger  
black nimbus into rain.(279)*



The poem 'Going down the Night River' (C.P.) is an important poem from the ecological point of view. It exhibits Daruwalla's deep affection with ecology through the metaphor of 'river' which is very cooperative to mankind. Sometimes the river gives certain repose to the tired people and quenches their thirst. The poet writes about the river in a symbolic way thus:

*The feet of water over rounded stone,  
like your hand over,  
The beloved's hip and thigh,  
and the river ardent as love,  
only it rushes on and on.  
Love must coil around something  
like that vine around  
the almond tree, flowering with love. (290)*

Daruwalla's poem entitled 'Island Notes' (C P) is also a significant poem dealing with physical environment and present the beauty of the sea of human life. The poet concludes the poem thus:

*The sea here is good at manufacturing  
this short stab of a twilight.  
Night is far too big when it falls upon the island.  
Its cloak-edge gets salt-wet in the sea. (318)*

Here, the use of metaphor of 'the sea of life' is marvellous.

In this way, Daruwalla's eco-centric outlook and his depiction of nature are remarkable. He is a poet of nature like Gray, Thompson, Wordsworth and the other great Romantics. His poetry presents a strong criticism of anthropocentrism and contains an eco-centric viewpoint. Thus, Daruwalla's keen interest in nature and his awareness of physical environment are the special charm of his poetry.

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