

## **Glimpses of Feminism in the Select Poems of KN Daruwalla**

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**Abstract:** KN Daruwalla is an Indian English poet who is much read as a modernist, nationalist, post-independence writer, and ecocritic. The main themes of his poetry are death and destruction, violence and agitation, nature and ecosystem, concerns and criticism, and legend and myths. Among his different themes, female oppression in the dominating male society is also the strongest, though the number of poems on this subject may be less. In these few poems, he questioned the unequal landscape of culture for the woman. However, a woman with all her powers and courage breaks the wires of boundaries and walks ahead of the man in the world. He has portrayed a woman with honor and respect. Although to show the reality, he has pictured a depressed, exploited, and subjugated image of the woman of different generations in India. This paper will explore the feministic social aspects of feminism in the unnoticed poems of Daruwalla.

**Keywords:** KN Daruwalla, Indian English Poetry, Feminism, Feminist, Indian society

The struggle of women is not a new thing for anyone. Their battle for their own identity for ages has taken the shape of 'Feminism,' the ideology that talks about the equality of women in social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Those who follow this notion are called feminists. Historically, first-wave feminism, which came after the 1790s' was related to the political and legal freedom that resulted. This wave gifted women the right to vote. Second-wave feminism during the 1960s', called for re-ranking the society to demolish the male center society. Third-wave feminism talked about 'consciousness raising,' which gives new theories during the 1990s' like postmodern feminism, transfeminism, vegetarian ecofeminism, etc.

Biologically or culturally born gender discrimination always persists in our society which has circumscribed the existence of women inside their homes and in society. The literature of Indian English poetry has always tried to present the actual picture of Indian women via poems of both male and female feminists as Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, A. K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Imtiaz Dharkar, K.N. Daruwalla, Mamta Kalia, etc., and KN Daruwalla is one of them. He is an Indian English poet who writes on

numerous themes. He was born in 1938 in Lahore and got his MA degree from Panjab University. He became an IPS officer in 1958 and earned varied experience in different places in India. Some poems of Daruwalla focus on women's continuous struggle and individual identity. All these poems have few but vital signs of female tribulations viz domestic violence, women security, motherhood and female grit, etc. This paper is aimed to trace the feministic reflections in the poems of Daruwalla.

Theoretically, feminism comes on the literature map with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). It criticized the thinking of men that women are on the earth to please men. She claimed equal rights for women as men have in all fields of society. Later, Jean Jacques Rousseau, a French philosopher, proposed that women as silly and frivolous creatures born subordinate to men. All these kinds of notions were the reasons behind the birth of feminism.

Hierarchy has always been an essential criterion of discrimination in Indian culture. In a family, age and gender are the fundamental differentiating basis, and in a society, sex, religion, caste, occupation, and political relationships are the segregating points. Men and women also accepted this criterion of discrimination (bigotry), and females willingly or unwillingly accepted all this till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although it was a matter of female justice, those were still men who had initially started the feminist movement in India, though women later joined it. Raja Ram Mohan Roy had initially begun the remarriage of the widow. A. Sinha opined that "Women in India are, by and large, a victim of social, economic, and political exploitation." (Madhuri, 2019) Mahatma Gandhi motivated women to be the part of Indian freedom struggle because freedom from the Britishers' dependency was not possible without the involvement of females. Currently, we can see many government campaigns for women's empowerment.

Daruwalla presents a woman from the later half of the 20th century in his poetry, where we find a woman either surrounded by her husband, kids, and other family members or suffering the consequences of inequality and the results of being a female in an artificial society. Daruwalla is not a feminist writer, yet he has depicted women's condition well in Indian culture. He has portrayed woman as a mother, wife, daughter, and sister, and somehow, he has shown how woman has been marginalized in Indian society. The woman is defined as a 'beauty confined inside the doors,' 'machine to create new life,' 'a householder,' 'weak, etc., in our culture. Earlier, women were respected and worshipped as the goddess of fortune, learning, strength, power, patience, etc. We can easily find all these references in the Vedas, Upanishads, and plans. Women who are famous in our mythologies are Sati, Sita, Arundhati, and Draupadi. In Daruwalla's poem *Draupadi*, he has presented an integrated image of women starting from ancient times to the present day. *Draupadi* is a short poem containing ten lines, although it explains the entire story of a woman jumping from the diaper period to the present kalyug. It presents a violent, cruel, inhuman, barbarous male-dominating society where a woman remains alone and segregated for ages till the current time. It is a short, essential, and unnoticed poem by the poet that talks about the traumatic journey of feminism.

The travails of Draupadi  
Are never-ending.  
Some people have it.  
In their bleeding stars:  
First exploited by the Pandavas,  
Five to one,  
Then by the Kauravas,  
Hundred to one  
And now by the feminists  
In millions. (340)

Being a poet of the modern age and having experience as an IPS officer, Daruwalla has first-hand experience of frustration and anguish among people after the partition and independence. Amid all these conditions, he has noticed the suffering of women in Indian society, which can be witnessed in the poem *Monologue in the Chambal Valley*.

Where did we not sell them?  
In holy fairs, in cattle markets  
to older men, girls younger than their daughters,  
to the young, one-eyed and lame who could not get a wife.  
You remember the one from Kulu, wire-thin and catty,  
A night I lay with her .... (48)

Females (Mothers) are the creator of new life. Between a man and a woman, only the woman has been blessed with the power to give birth to a new life. However, this blessing is converted into a curse in the present scenario. As reflected in his poem, *History*, "The women bore children/ Year after year, uncomplaining" (239). Nancy Chodorow wrote, "Women as mothers are pivotal actors in the sphere of social reproduction." (Dey & Das, 65). Nevertheless, these pivotal actors are for granted and brutally exploited by these patriarchs, which can be noticed in the poems of Daruwalla. For instance, in the poem *Calender, Starting with June*, 'A woman ends her/ thirst in a dry well, one babe in each armpit' (132), and the poem, *Notes*.

A child tucked in each armpit.  
She jumps into the well-  
Her husband had run away with their last meal. (134)

The relationship between a mother and child, child is a responsibility of a mother-not of a father and is a social and cultural construct. However, all these cobwebs of children and family responsibilities have entangled a female's identity as an individual. Sexual exploitation is another aspect of feminism that has been highlighted in these lines:

There is no red-light area in the town  
Where starving daughters can be sold." (135)

Here, the situation talks about the famine which overpowered all the people of the area during the period of late 1970s; the people were forced to sell their daughters for food in India, but not their sons because how can we sell our family sunshine and also there is no

market where sons are purchased or sold. All these patriarchal dichotomies are made for females only, not for males. Issues like the subjugation of women, gender biases, vulnerability, and man dominance are the key components of his poetry.

The struggle to provide a sustainable environment to all females has been the concern of many reformers, activists, authors, and government. They have always tried to educate women and make them mentally and economically independent. The poet also raises his voice against the exploitation and for the betterment of females, and henceforth women can “deconstruct masculine privilege and challenge institutionalized patriarchy.” (Jahan, 84)

One general notion is that struggle starts with the origin of life, but this equation fails in the case of females. Their struggle starts before their birth. The seeds of their birth get clouded by the trivial acts of this humanity, like abortion, sex determination, and females. After birth, there is an endless list of other existential problems like nurturing factors, early marriage, the dowry system, and different myths about a girl. However, to sensitize society about this myth related to girl child-birth, our poet has celebrated the birth of a daughter in the poem, *To My Daughter Rookzain*. His writing creativity and the importance of a daughter in the family and society can be judged from these lines:

Three years and then again  
The uterus flowered.....  
...then you cried  
...and she came back (176-177)

The poem closely resembles the poem of W.B. Yeats's *Prayer for My Daughter*, where a father is inquisitive and worried about her daughter's future.

... do not panic; you will find an arm. (177)

Another aspect of a woman is being a 'mother'. When we talk about a mother, the image of a woman changes every person's mind. In the words of Daruwalla, the mother is the topmost priority, which can be witnessed in the lines from the poem: *Mother*.

The words of the prophet come to mind  
'Heaven was built  
Under the feet of mothers.' (109)

A mother is universally acclaimed as an epitome of sacrifice, endurance, and submission; still, her position in society is of secondary importance.

Except for these poems, some poems of Daruwalla can be critically studied under ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a relationship between women and natural components. It emphasized that nature and women must be respected. His series of four poems titled *Vignette* delineates the life of a river and a woman's life.

After a critical rendition of these poems, Daruwalla has idiosyncratically reflected the gender binaries, the orthodox thought process, and culturally born disparities. It seems that his objective behind writing poems is not just to show the lens to the crippled society regarding the female condition but to make the people sensitize the miserable condition of women in this democratic country. He skillfully portrayed the whole scenario of feminism

using straightforward and lucid diction. His delineation of feminism may not be so deep, but it is worthwhile enough for the readers to get aware of the turmoil faced by the unborn baby fetus, young girls, women, and even old-age women. He is both worried and aware of her pathetic condition in society. The words from his poem *Living on hyphen's* give one kind of crucial solution to the problems of feminism; a man, a woman/ must come to an understanding.' The paper's outcome states that feminism is one of the essential aspects of his poetry, where one explores the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Indian female world. His writing regarding women is very crisp, spontaneous, and natural.

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