

THE AMBIVALENCE OF NATURE IN THE POETRY OF KEKI N. DARUWALLA

Dr. Amol Mohan Raut

Professor & Head, Department of

English

Yashoda Girls' Arts and Commerce

College, Nagpur

Crossref DOI - <https://doi.org/10.63665/rh.v7i1.85>

Abstract :

The paper seeks the multifaceted and often contradictory portrayal of the natural world in the poetic piece of Keki N. Daruwalla. Moving beyond the traditional Romantic glorification of nature as a kind healer, Daruwalla's verse presents a landscape characterized by two contradictory concepts, a land where beauty and brutality coexist in a state of continuous tension. Developing eco-criticism as the primary theoretical framework, the study investigates the 'ambivalence' essential in Daruwalla's depiction of rivers, mountains, and wildlife. The paper explores Daruwalla's environmental vision is shaped by a forensic realism likely influenced by his professional background in the Indian Police Service. This perspective strips nature of its rustic sentimentality, revealing it as an indifferent, often unfriendly force that mirrors the disorder of human existence. The analysis focuses on key ideas such as the river as both life-giver and destroyer, and the voracious natures of the animal kingdom as metaphors for social and political chaos.

Keywords : Ecocriticism, Ambivalence, Realism, Landscape, Topography, Postcolonial

Introduction :

Keki N. Daruwalla is broadly recognized for his complex portrayal of nature, weaving it into the fabric of his poetry with extraordinary richness and strength. His works exceed traditional literary portrayals of the environment, allowing nature itself to act as a narrative force that shapes the human experience. Daruwalla's poems, such as *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), *The Ghagra in Spate*, *Nightscape Vignettes*, and *Map-maker*, showcase his genius in depicting nature not simply as a backdrop but as an active agent of change. These poems highlight the complications of nature and its aptitude to influence, interact with, and reflect the human condition. Landscape is not simply a physical view; it is the world as perceived through a specific human perspective. While it begins with nature, the variety we find in literature is a change of reality shaped by the human mind.

Daruwalla's poetic works are fundamentally anchored in Indian geography, with a particular focus on northern plains, riverine landscapes, and mountain ranges. In his collection *Crossing of Rivers*, the river transcends its physical form to serve as a metaphor for life's inherent instability and constant flux. By personifying the water describing it as



coughing or conversing with mud Daruwalla elevates nature into a dynamic force of both peace and chaos. This is further mirrored in *The Ghagra in Spate*, where the flooding river symbolizes the dual cycles of destruction and rebirth. Ultimately, these descriptions highlight an ecocritical lens that views nature as a vital participant in human existence rather than a mere backdrop. The works of the poet explores the ambivalence of the environment shifting between majestic beauty and ruthless violence. Daruwalla reveals a complex relationship between human history and the indifferent force of nature. Unlike romanticized nature poetry, Daruwalla's work is rooted in environmental determinism and the visceral realities of the Indian landscape.

Landscape as an Active Agent :

In an eco-critical reading, the environment is never a mere backdrop; it is a protagonist. Daruwalla focuses on the 'spirit of the place,' where geography the Terai, the mountains, and the rivers dictate human survival. In poems like *'The Ghagra in Spate,'* the river is not a benevolent mother but a 'cannibalistic' force. It exists outside human morality, shifting its course and reclaiming land without regard for civilization. His poetry is deeply 'place oriented,' emphasizing the physical grit, heat, and dust of Northern India, which aligns with the ecocritical shift from the 'ego' to the 'eco.'

Collapse of the Human-Nature Hierarchy :

Daruwalla frequently uses predatory imagery to bridge the gap between human violence and natural ferocity. From an ecocritical perspective, this suggests that humans are not "above" nature but are biological entities governed by the same primal instincts as the wilderness. He often describes human actions through the lenses of wolves, hawks, or hyenas. This highlights the interconnectedness of all living things, a core tenet of ecocriticism. Themes of hunting in his work explore the ethics of human interference in ecosystems, often portraying the tragic consequences of disrupting the natural order.

Rejection of the Pathetic Fallacy :

A primary marker of Daruwalla's ecocritical stance is his rejection of the 'pathetic fallacy.' He rarely attributes human emotions to the natural world. Instead, he practices Ecological Realism. He views death and decay (as seen in his descriptions of Parsi funeral rites in *'The Keeper of the Dead'* as essential elemental returns to the earth, fire, and air. His work acknowledges that nature is a chaotic system. The floods, droughts, and storms in his poems are not metaphors for human moods but objective biological and geological events.

Objectives of the Study :

1. To examine the portrayal of natural elements (water, fire, earth) as agents of both life and destruction in Daruwalla's poetry.
2. To analyze how the poet's professional experience as a police officer influences his "forensic" and unsentimental view of the environment.
3. To explore the intersection of human violence and natural disasters in selected poems



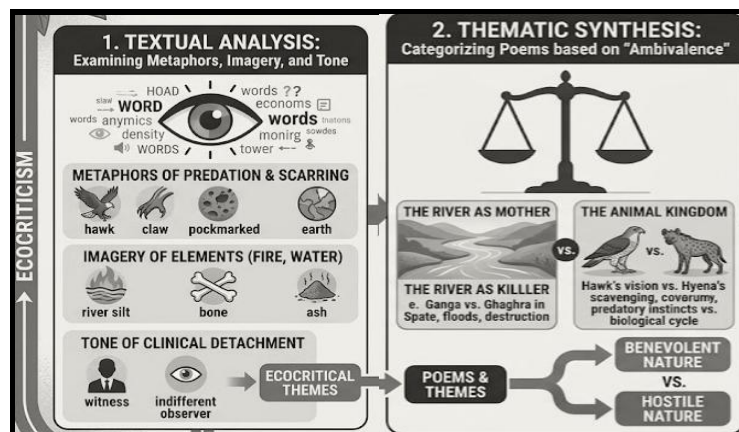
like *The Ghaghra in Spate*.

- To evaluate Daruwalla's contribution to Indian English Ecocritical literature.

Nature as Creator and Destroyer it examines the portrayal of natural elements water, fire, and earth not as passive settings, but as active agents of both sustenance and catastrophe. We look into the transition from the 'River as Mother' civilization source to the 'River as Killer' biological threat. Applying the concept of Non-human Agency to show how elements operate outside human moral codes. Scientific Ecocriticism is to analyze how the poet's career in the Indian Police Service (IPS) shapes his 'forensic' and unsentimental perspective on the environment. Exploring how a professional habit of 'witnessing' crime scenes translates into a poetic style that views a landscape with clinical, objective detachment. Examining the rejection of the Pathetic Fallacy in Favor of a rugged, biological realism and also, to explore the intersection between human-centric violence riots, social unrest and natural disasters floods, droughts in selected poems. The primary text: *The Ghaghra in Spate* which focus and on determining if Daruwalla views human violence as an extension of the 'predatory' nature of the wild, effectively collapsing the boundary between human society and the animal kingdom. Positioning in Indian Ecocriticism and assessing how his 'muscular' wilderness poetry offers an alternative to the interior, heritage-focused nature poetry of his contemporaries. It establishes Daruwalla's as a pioneer of deep ecology within the post-colonial Indian poetic tradition.

Analytical Method :

The following diagram illustrates how these methods intersect to form a comprehensive ecocritical study of Daruwalla's work.



The focus is on the 'muscularity' of Daruwalla language and how it serves an ecocritical purpose. Rather than pastoral metaphors, Daruwalla uses 'predatory' language. Landscapes are often described as 'scarred,' 'pockmarked,' or 'clawed,' treating the earth as a physical body that endures both natural and human-induced trauma. Fire and water are stripped of their usual romantic symbolism. They are treated as objective biological forces. The imagery focuses on the 'grit and grime' 'mud, silt, bone, and ash' emphasize the physical reality of the ecosystem. His tone is often that of a witness.

This 'eco-critical distance' reinforces the idea that nature is indifferent to human suffering; the river does not flood out of anger, but out of hydrological necessity. The Spectrum of Ambivalence Daruwalla's work is characterized by a 'dual-natured' view of the environment. A thematic synthesis categorizes his poems based on how they treat this environmental volatility. The Indian Context Contrasting Daruwalla with his contemporaries highlights his unique ecocentric position. Ramanujan often views nature through the lens of memory and heritage-family trees. Daruwalla views it through geography and survival. Where Ramanujan finds 'roots,' Daruwalla, finds 'dust.' Kamala Das uses nature as a mirror for subjective desire- the 'pathetic fallacy'. Daruwalla rejects this; for him, the sea or the heat is a physical condition, not an emotional state. The Analytical Method, by synthesizing these approaches, one can prove that Daruwalla 'ambivalence' isn't a lack of direction, but a realistic acknowledgment of Environmental Determinism. His poetry serves as a reminder that human structures are ultimately fragile when placed within the larger, often indifferent, cycles of the Earth.

Through an Ecocritical lens, his work recommends that the environment is an indifferent and often unfriendly force that does not merely 'reflect' human suffering but actively shapes and strengthens it. Nature as an Active Agent- Daruwalla rejects the idea of the landscape as a 'passive backdrop.' In his poetry, rivers, mountains, and storms possess their own agency. They are protagonists that act upon the human world with a 'cannibalistic' or predatory energy. The Hostile Landscape- The environment is often depicted as a combatant. Whether it is the biting cold of the Himalayas or the erratic flooding of the Ghaghra, nature dictates the terms of survival, often ignoring human pleas for mercy. The Mirror of Social Chaos, there is a profound intersection between natural turbulence and social disorder. Daruwalla frequently uses the violence of the natural world to parallel the political and social unrest he witnessed in his professional life. Socio-Natural Violence- A flood is not just a hydrological event; it is a catalyst for displacement, hunger, and the breakdown of social structures. The 'Predatory' Human by using zoomorphism describing humans through animal traits, he suggests that social chaos is an extension of the primal, predatory laws found in the wild.

Environmental Indifference- One of his most significant summaries is the rejection of the pathetic fallacy. In Daruwalla's world, nature does not 'weep' for human tragedy. The Forensic Gaze- Just as a police officer views a crime scene with clinical detachment, Daruwalla views the environment through a 'forensic' lens. This unsentimental perspective reinforces the idea that nature is a massive, self-governing system that remains largely indifferent to the moral or emotional states of mankind. Ultimately, Daruwalla's nature is vindictory and deterministic. It is a raw, elemental power that serves as a reminder of human fragility. By centring the 'hostile' force of the environment, he contributes a unique, bio-centric voice to Indian literature, asserting that while humans may try to map the land, the land ultimately maps the human destiny.

Works Cited :

- Daruwalla, K. (2006). *Collected Poems: 1970-2005*. Penguin UK.



- Greg, G. (2004). *Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gokak, V. K. (Ed.). (1970). *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry*, . 1828-1965. Sahitya Akademi.
- Karmakar, G., *The Poetic Cosmos and Craftsmanship of a Bureaucrat Turned Poet: An Interview with Keki N. Daruwalla*. *An International Journal of Asian Literatures, Cultures and Englishers*, 2017, 11(1) 250-260.
- Shikha, K. (2011). *Ecocriticism in Indian fiction*. *IRWLE*, 7(1), 1-11.

