

17 February 1999



Sahitya Akademi



India International Centre

invite you to

**meet the author**

**Keki N. Daruwalla**



*Now things are changed; a philosophy slips out  
as an age loses its teeth. Nothing holds fast  
Decay sets in with birth:  
We rust like iron, we splinter like glass.*

From "The Glass-Blower"

**K**EKI Nasserwanji Daruwalla, one of the gifted Indian poets in English is uniformly acknowledged as "a critic of his age." By putting Daruwalla among his contemporaries, one sees "how he scores heavily over them." Daruwalla like A.K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel writes, "walks the Indian tight-rope wearing the home-made masks of the insider-outsider. Ramanujan avoids the sophistication of the rootless. Daruwalla avoids the parochialism of the native. They are men of integrity and strength who recognise the easy solutions and reject them."

Born in 1937 at Lahore, Keki N. Daruwalla, took his Masters degree in English Literature from the Punjab University. He joined the Indian Police

Service in 1958. In 1980-81 he went to Oxford as a Visiting Fellow. Daruwalla has published seven volumes of poetry, a book of poems for children, two collections of short stories and has edited an anthology of poetry.

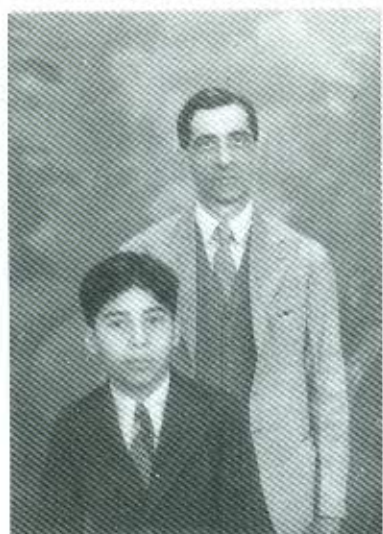
Even his first collection of poems, *Under Orion* (1970), is an impressive evidence not only of Daruwalla's mature poetic talent but also of his literary stamina, intellectual strength of mind and social awareness. His earlier verse collections *Under Orion*, *Apparitions in April* (1971) and *Winter Poems* (1980) mostly depict death, famine and political corruption. The poet as a moralist, is trying to open our eyes to the tragedy around us. With *Crossing of Rivers* (1976), Daruwalla



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award, 1985

achieved remarkable aesthetic elegance. About *Crossing of Rivers* Michael Hulse writes "it is a formidable achievement, the work of a poet whose art, compassion and observation are of a piece." Like T. S. Eliot, Daruwalla parallels the degraded contemporary scene with the spiritually ennobling. An outstanding characteristic of Daruwalla's poetry is the vivid imagery in which his poetic reality arranges itself.

In *Winter Poems*, the vast landscape comes alive in the pages of Daruwalla's poetry through his deft masterly touches. The poem "Hunger-74" depicts famine mostly through the description of the arid landscape. "My poetry" says Daruwalla "is earthy and I like to consciously keep it that way." The intensity of Daruwalla's response to the experience of reality indicates his



*With his father*

identification and involvement with the objective reality of the situations of life. Robert Graves aptly describes him as "a poet with the compulsion to tell the truth, however cruel."

The Sahitya Akademi award-winning collection of poems, *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982) is marked by its thematic



*Reading poetry at Struga (Yugoslavia) at a poetry festival in 1985. Yannis Ritsos well-known Greek poet (with beard and hand on chin) is seated to his left*

variety, vivid imagery and unique poetic sensibility. Bruce King, Professor and a literary critic of the University of North Alabama (USA), comments that "Daruwalla's poems are concrete, precise and well-crafted, while revealing so much tension and violence, and might be explained in terms of his life and position in India . . . Daruwalla's best poetry can be found where he reveals himself most fully and interestingly." *Landscapes*, his next poetry collection was published in 1987.

*A Summer of Tigers* — a collection of poems, came out after a long silence of eight years. His range, always formidable, now widened further and he took subjects as diverse as alchemy and Braque, a letter to Neruda or a take-off on Cavafy, the birth of a foal or an incident at Isfahan in his poetic stride. His poetry now is as impassioned as before but less restrained.

With the publication of two short collections, *Sword and Abyss* in 1979 and *The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other Stories* in 1996, Daruwalla has shown that he is equally at ease and engaging in another genre. His stories made no less an impact than his poetry. "The Minister for Permanent Unrest," the title story, demonstrates Daruwalla's imaginative skills and the other stories are set in the dim historical past and in faraway places. A variety of characters people



*At a literary Conference at Erlangen*

Daruwalla's fertile canvas. In him we find the confluence of Indian culture with its customs, habits, rural celebrations and religious fervour.

Besides these, Daruwalla has edited an anthology of Indian poetry in English entitled *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-80*. His poems have been published in most anthologies of English language poetry from India and abroad. He has been published widely abroad in journals like *Poetry Review*, London, *Antioch Review*, *Dalhousie Review*, *New letters*, *Nimrod*, *Kunapipi* and *Aerial*. He has been translated into Swedish, Magyar and German.

Besides the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984, he won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asian Region) in 1987 for his volume *Landscapes*. Along with other Commonwealth Poetry winners, he gave

readings in London, the University of Hull, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Exeter and Bristol during a poetry reading tour of England. He has also read his poetry at Struga, the University of Stockholm and at an interna-

tional Conference of Literature at Erlangen, Munich and Feurt.

Daruwalla is presently engaged in writing a novel and also working on a poetry volume, "The Fire-altar."

*The first time men saw this state of mist,  
this veil that veiled nothing — O glorious deception —  
and glass cool into colour of space, did they cry out  
"This is no object, it is thought, perception!"*

From "The Glass-Blower"

## A Select Bibliography

### Poetry

- Under Orion*, 1970
- Apparition in April*, 1971
- Crossing of Rivers*, 1976
- Winter Poems*, 1980
- The Keeper of the Dead*, 1982
- Landscapes*, 1987
- A Summer of Tigers*, 1996

### Fiction

- Sword and Abyss*, 1979
- The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other Stories*, 1996

### Children's Books

- Mr. Mugger and Mr. Stripes*  
(poetry)

### Edited

- Two Decades of Indian Poetry:  
1960-80*

### Selective Anthologies

- Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, New Delhi, 1976
- Poems of Black Africa*, Edited by Wole Soyinka, London, 1975
- Uncommon Wealth: An Anthology of Poetry in English*, Toronto, 1997
- Scanning the Century*, London, 1999



*With Mahasweta Devi in  
Paris, 1985*

## A Chronology

- |         |  |      |  |
|---------|--|------|--|
| 1937    | Born in Lahore   |      | Award for <i>The Keeper of the Deed</i> (poetry volume)                                      |
| 1958    | Took his Masters degree  |      |  |
| 1959    | Joined the Indian Police Service   | 1985 | Represented India at the Struga Poetry Evenings, Yugoslavia                                  |
| 1964    | First poems published in <i>Quest</i>                                    | 1987 | Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia Region)  |
| 1965    | Marriage to Khorshed   |      |  |
| 1970    | First poetry volume, <i>Under Orion</i> , published                      | 1988 | Represented India at an International literary conference (Interlit 11) at Erlangen, Germany |
| 1979    | Posted as Special Assistant to the Prime Minister                        | 1990 | Additional Secretary, Government of India  |
|         | Published first short story collection: <i>Word and Abyss</i>            | 1992 | Special Secretary, Government of India   |
| 1980-81 | Visiting Fellow at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, under the Colombo Plan | 1993 | Chairman JIC and Secretary   |
| 1983-87 | Member on the English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi                    | 1995 | Retired from Government service  |
| 1984    | Sahitya Akademi  | 1996 | Published first novella, <i>The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other stories</i>          |



*With his family*