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# EXPLORING IDENTITY CRISIS THROUGH NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT IN THE POEMS OF KEKI DARUWALLA, DILIP CHITRE AND MEENA KANDASAMY

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## Abstract

Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre and Meena Kandasamy have made a great contribution to the domain of Indian Literature in English. In this paper, "Exploring Identity Crisis through Narratives of Conflict in the Poems of Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre and Meena Kandasamy", the poems selected for the study are Keki Daruwalla's "Map Maker" and "A Take- Off on a Passing Remark", Dilip Chitre's "Ode to Bombay" and Meena Kandasamy's "Eklavyan". A critical analysis of these poems demonstrates that our country has been grappling with communal problems and caste/ class discrimination at the national level and loneliness and identity crisis at the individual level. The main objective of the paper is to explore the inner turmoil of individuals due to political, socio-cultural and economic changes that swept India after Independence. The poems expose the selfish motives of politicians and influential people who exploit the weaker sections of society.

**Keywords:** Identity Crisis, Conflict, Alienation and Fascism

## Paper

The paper "Exploring Identity Crisis through Narratives of Conflict in the Poems of Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre and Meena Kandasamy" describes the tragic condition of

Indians in the Post- Independence Era. Their poems depict issues of communal disharmony, political high- handedness and class/caste discrimination in India. The main objective of the paper is to explore the inner turmoil of individuals due to political, socio-cultural and economic changes that swept India after Independence. The poems expose the selfish motives of politicians and influential people who exploit the weaker sections of society. These poets also point out how violence and hatred has disrupted peace in both rural and urban areas in India.

The poets, Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre and Meena Kandasamy, have earned lot of fame and recognition for their enormous contribution in the field of Literature. Keki Daruwalla has received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of poems titled *The Keeper of the Dead* published in 1982. Dilip Chitre, also a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, is famous for both his English and Marathi poems. He is known for *Travelling in a Cage* (1980) and his translated poems titled "Says Tuka" (poems originally written by the notable poet and saint, Sant Tukaram). Meena Kandasamy, a popular contemporary poetess, is known for her works titled *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010).

The poems taken up for the study are Keki Daruwalla's "Map Maker" and "A Take- Off on a Passing Remark", Dilip Chitre's "Ode to

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Bombay” and Meena Kandasamy’s “Eklavyan”. One of the most recurring themes that strike a common chord among these poets is the depiction of the sad plight of Indians who struggled for independence in the past only to find themselves victimized because of religious feuds instigated by political leaders. They also bemoan the draining of human values of integrity and justice from a secular India.

Keki Daruwalla in his poem “Map Maker” presents an image of India as a land of turmoil where maps keep changing continuously. So the speaker of the poem feels that ‘perhaps he’ ll wake up on some alien shore’ (Daruwalla 29). Then the speaker puts forth a question: “Does the world really need maps?” (29). Maps contain signs and symbols and then they are rolled into scrolls. He further writes: “You see them mountain chains with rain gods in their armpits” (29). Within these maps, he sees chains of mountains and depressions that are formed which he calls the armpits of gods. However, gods live in these mountains and so this divine power of the majestic mountains cannot be rolled up in these maps.

In these maps, even deserts, scrubs and pastures do not need any shading as their beauty can be felt by our own eyes. In the following lines:

Forget markings, forget landfall and sea.  
Go easy Man, I tell myself; breathe  
Gulls will mark the estuary for you,  
Bubbles will indicate where the swamps seethe.  
Map the wrinkles on the ageing skin of love.  
(Daruwalla 30)

Thus, the speaker of the poem reminds us that Eastings and Northings stand for order. The more the lines the more the borders and the more the fights. So he wants every human being to forget

markings, forget landfall and the sea. He wants us to map the wrinkles on the aging skin of love. When love is young, it is full of passion but when it grows older the wrinkles of love are indeed beautiful. So the speaker wants us to stop wasting our time on the senseless idea of map-making and he tells us that we should be rebuilding love in the world.

The speaker’s casual remark “Go easy man, breathe...” (30) tells us that we must not make life complicated for others by building borders, maps and lines. So we must breathe freely, live and let live. If there were no maps, lines and borders- wars such as Kalinga would never have happened. Therefore, he wants to renounce maps and live freely. Then he suggests that instead of maps, we must study the horoscope of the brown people or Indians- their history, customs and languages and also learn about their sorrows instead of wasting time in making useless maps.

In “A Take-Off on a Passing Remark” by Keki Daruwalla the speaker begins the poem by describing the magnificence of tall buildings that cut off half the sky. The country has walked on the path of progress after independence but it has led to loss of individual identity. The tall buildings are symbols of progress which cut off the beauty of the sky however no human being could think of touching the sky but these tall buildings make every dream possible.

The speaker of the poem “A Take-Off on a Passing Remark” also says that he likes tall stories though fake because these are complete lies while he doesn’t like the half lie sleeping with the half- truth. He feels that people should take proper stand. They can call themselves total liars or they should be completely truthful people He likes things on a large scale- a sense of space and light because it makes him feel the joy of freedom.

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The great yellow eye of the train that lights up distances is the symbol of modernity after independence and the poet is fascinated at the kind of change that progress has brought in human life. He draws a comparison between the artificial city life where flower beds adorn balconies but its forest areas there are flowering trees, long streamers of moss and flaming parasites. Therefore, he yearns for the contentment found in the pastoral landscape of the countryside rather than the artificiality of cities.

In "Ode to Bombay" by Dilip Chitre, the Piano symbolises family as one history with its great connections. It can be a black symbol of coffin or death. It can also be the need for expression, the longing to communicate. Lack of interaction in present times, especially after independence, has led to loneliness and alienation of people living isolated lives.

The speaker in the poem "Ode to Bombay" is going through an inner conflict as he feels that he is slowly moving towards death so he wants to let loose every memory of Bombay that is fixed in his mind. He says that he wants to unfasten the bridges of Bombay from his insistent bones. He wants to separate or free the railway lines from his desperate veins. He wants to break free from the noise of the crowded city and machines. He wants to remove the temples and brothels pinned in his skull. He wants to walk out of murders and riots. He wants to forget great biographies. He knows Bombay is a bed of burning languages. All these memories will vanish in the air.

The feeling of identity crisis has set in because he feels that a part of his self has broken away from his motherland. Therefore, he says that he cannot present a real concerto to Bombay

because the city has failed him but he partially resolves the conflict with Bombay by saying that his annihilation will be complete as there will be plenty of flowers, petals, perfumes that he will release from himself like a song as an offering to the city of Bombay.

In "Eklavya" by Meena Kandasamy, Eklavya is a famous legendary character who cut off his right thumb as an offering to his Guru Dronacharya. It was Dronacharya who demanded this sacrifice from him as he wanted to suppress the warrior skills of Eklavya so that Arjun, his disciple, becomes a powerful archer. He did not want Eklavya, an outcast, to be a threat to Arjun so without any feeling of mercy, he demanded his thumb which is a symbol of authority.

Meena Kandasamy refers to the present day politicians of our country as fascist Dronacharyas. Fascism prevails in India as the ruling right party is highly authoritarian and it crushes any rebellion and even tramples our demands for freedom. Similarly, the higher castes are mostly a part of right wing groups. In the following lines:

You can do a lot of things  
With your left hand  
Besides, fascist Dronacharyas  
Warrant Left-handed treatment. (Touch 44)

Social conflict takes place because of the dominance of the right-wing groups which crush the lower castes under their feet just like the erasure of Eklavya's identity. Meena Kandasamy demonstrates how politicians/ Dronacharyas use fascist techniques to oppress the left wing groups.

She feels that the power of left wing groups should not be taken for granted as they all can unite and fight against all kinds of injustice.



They just need to come together to fight through a mass struggle against the ruling party and their being leftist does not stop them from fighting for their dignity. At the end of the poem, she says that you don't need a right thumb to pull a trigger or hurl a bomb. This means that left thumb can resolve conflict as it may be a neglected finger but it has a lot of power to shake the world.

Thus, the poems of Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre and Meena Kandasamy depict the social, political and cultural challenges faced by individuals as India was moving along the path of progress. These poets explored their minds and presented their narratives of conflict through the medium of poetry.

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