



Kammo, Tejban and the Sexual Politics in Keki N Daruwalla's *The Jahangir Syndrome* Srimay Sinha

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Abstract

Keki N Daruwalla's short story "The Jahangir Syndrome" insights a deep psychological reading of the society of 1940s as well as two important characters of the story Tejban and Kammo. Kunwar Tejban Sing worked as a landlord and now as an Honorary Magistrate meets his highest point of his career. He doled out justice. Kammo, on the other hand is the wife of old Ramdin, not satisfied in her daily life and clearly neither she gets any from her husband. Kammo is the only woman character in this short story. This paper focuses on the treatment of this single woman character and her relationship with Ramdin, Beeru and Tejban, three important male figures of the story. Her descriptions are sensuous but her name suggests her identity. Her physic is described and inspected by male in the male dominated society. Looking beyond that one can discover it is not only the simple description or any relation rather the domination of woman and her identity through the politics of sex of male over female, what Kate Millet long ago establishes in "Sexual Politics" (1969).

Keki N Daruwalla's "Love Across the Salt Desert" is a collection of 20 short stories. The stories have no thematic similarities as they portray wide range of characters and surroundings. Yet despite the disparity the stories have a common bind of psychological insight. Daruwalla's strength lies in exploring the intricacies of individual personalities. A theme running through several stories is that of the schizophrenic mind torn apart by public posturing on the one hand and dark uncontrollable passions on the other. The Owllet Beats the Drum confronts this dilemma through the story of Saint Burnhanuddin of Saqsin who preaches a tyrannically puritanical life, but is devoured by a consuming passion for Zulekha, the daughter of a Bedouin leader. Finally he breaks and unleashes destruction on the entire city. "The Jahangir Syndrome", however, locates its schizophrenic protagonist in the India of the 1940s. Tejbhan Singh's professional life meets with increasing success while his personal life gets mired in layers of deceit, manipulation and personal vendetta. Yet, unlike Burnhanuddin, he realises that one has to "make one's partial settlements in life". Interestingly this story is not only about Tejban Sing or Ramdin. Kammo, translated as Kamni is the only woman character in the whole story. She is equally linked with the three male characters: Tejban, Ramdin and Beeru.

Tejban Sing in his forty years of age received the job in Lukhnow. He has accepted the changes in the administration: 'When the nizam changed, it was good to be in with the new order. His feudal rights now has extended over fifty villages and 'Ramdin had been one of his "subjects" who had sought justice at his door.' (p.53) Tejban Singh had to attend Ramdin who objects that his fifty years age and blindness helps his thirty six years old wife to carry a promiscuous relationship with the goatherd Beeru. Ramdin emphasizes his wife's adulterous nature. This is the first introduction we receive of Kammo before she actually comes into full play:

"Don't you understand?" the old man had asked." I am fifty years old and blind. My wife is thirty six. And this goatherd, he comes to the house daily." (p.54)

Kate Millett stressed the idea of sexuality in her seminal essay that sexuality is a tool through which stereotyping of the female –as prostitutes, virgins, unchaste women-achieves patriarchal domination. Millett defines this as 'sexual politics. She also states that sexual politics is the arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. For Millett these arrangements that control sexual relationships extended into the domain of ideology, socio-cultural institutions like

family, religion and education and psychology. This is seen in *The Jahangir Syndrome* throughout. The first dismissal does not stop Ramdin for coming again to Tejban. This time Ramdin objects about giving him lesser food. These repeated objections compel Tejban to call for Ramdin's wife. Previously the goatherd, Beeru was called for questioning. And he was silenced. However the description through the eyes of the 'power' is interesting:

Kunwar Sahib noted the tuft of beard on his chin, his wry body and the utterly neat clothes that he wore. Not at all the kind of thing one expected. The waist cloth was spotless. His shins gleamed like two ebony stilts in the sun. Young and litch he thought. Not more than twenty five, and must be fairly randy in bed. (p. 55)

Tejban Sing eventually calls Kammo, Ramdin's lecherous wife. It was evident. The first description we get is about her physic and in full detail. When Tejban returns from his day's works he finds her 'squatting on the grass in the winter sun, angry, petulant, and beautiful.' (p. 56)

The politics of sexual activity, Millett explains, that is, the question of with whom and under what circumstances women are permitted to engage in sex—is an essential part of patriarchal power. In Millett's terms, in such a power structure, women are never their own agents; they are commodities silenced by the freedom of men to sexually possess them. Kammo's description, purely physical, is approving the statement that Millett long ago established:

God above, and how beautiful! Her slim, reed like waist was topped by a full torso. Her face was well-fleshed and glowing, the eyes clear and bright, the mouth sensuous, the skin unblemished by a single freckle, more or pimple-mark. (p. 56)

The woman as under the supervision of power becomes not submissive at all. This is where domination stumbles. Tejban Sing's physical show off does not make her passive. Neither she is petrified. The bold and logical approach is evident when she replies back to Tejban's query about her name:

"Surely you didn't send for me all this way merely to ask that? You know my name or else how did you send for me?" (p.56)

Her name is Kammo, means Kamini. She even does not keep herself submissive rather expects a proper explanation for 'why had she been kept waiting for six hours'. She is starving and is 'given few cold, stiff cakes of unleavened bread and some lentils in an enameled plate from which the paint had come off.' (p.56) At this point she resists and throws the plate and finally is served in a steel plate. This 'woman as demon' nature is unlikely. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their "Mad Woman in the Attic" (1979) analyses that women in early the 19th century were working from within a male vision of creativity. Women had to negotiate with the male fantasies of female, which were either of the submissive female as angel or the dangerous female as monster. Kammo's behavior is seen not as an independent woman's courageous demeanor rather she is granted as would be of Kunwar Sahib. And as a subject of Kunwar Sing she has every right to show her 'tantrums':

"She hasn't even become the Kunwar Sahib's keep as yet," said the cook in a derisive aside to one of his fellow servants, "and already she is throwing tantrums!" (p.56)

Tejban has a long conversation with Kammo regarding many trivial things, the size of their holdings, the crops, the village she came from etc. The 'casual' conversation that Tejban Sing continues with Kammon is practically not casual at all. It is political. The conversation carries the necessary information regarding a woman's origin which very soon will be omitted! It is that male domination through sexual politics. Tejban's eyes examine him thoroughly:

Every now and then his eyes bored into her like a rock drill. (p.56)

The sexual undertone and sexual gesture is evident in Tejban's sudden touch to Kammo's shoulders and the sexual intonation in the indication of Kammo's settlement at the arms of the goatherd. He concludes: 'You were never meant for the likes of him, (p.57)

Millett argues that the history of women is full of colorful artifact, e.g. the bound feet of all of old China's women---women deliberately deformed- that they might be better controlled -- (you can work with those useless feet, but you cannot run away) -- the veil of Islam (or an attenuated existence as a human soul condemned to wear a cloth sack over her head all the days of her half-life) ;-- the lash, the rod, domestic imprisonment through most of the world's history -rape, concubinage, prostitution . Women are still sold in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. In Switzerland, they are even today

disenfranchised. And in nearly every rod of ground on this earth they live only via the barter system of sex in return for food of the latter. This wide range of experience is even visible in the attitude of Tejban Sing's ideological treatment of Kammo. She is getting late and the moment she wants to go out Tejban holds her back:

He shouted for his cook. "It is very late; this poor woman cannot go back tonight. See that she is made comfortable in one of the out houses." (p.57)

This apparent mild order becomes permanent. She brings Tejban luck. Within a month she becomes a 'permanent fixture' in the outhouse. He gets his appointment as Honorary Magistrate. And as a man in power he normally strolls in after dinner. This sexual domination is so clear when his wife sardonically replies to some of his friends, who 'dropped in rather late': 'Kunwar Sahib has gone for his evening betel' (p.57) Kammo's existence is completely recreated. Even Ramdin cannot get hold of Kammo. The servants know the drill. They frankly say that there is no Kammo staying in Kunwar Sahib's bungalow. Tejban Sing sometimes attends Ramdin and either he gives him money or speaks to him kindly 'saying he was keeping a strict eye on Kammo.' This vigilance is ironical. Tejban Sing practically keeps a 'strict eye' on her. Tejban Sing's desire to keep kammo and have sex with her is a clear version of male domination. Daruwalla's "The Owlet Beats the Drum" presents Burhanuddin's desire for Zulekha in different scale. Unlike Tejban Burhanuddin fantasizes her, however never gets hold of him, either by force or by ideological domination. Zulekh too is responsive towards the saint's desire. The description too is sensuous, however not poised with political intonation:

Each night Burhanuddin fantasized about her, sometimes picturing her as small and feline, dark eyed and insatiable, her aquiline nose flaring with passion. Sometimes he thought of his dusky complexioned and large of limb, her breasts billowing like a cloak in the desert breeze. So strong were these fantasies that they not only overpowered him but even reached out to her. (p.68)

Burhanuddin checks himself finally and commits suicide. Thus he remains the saint and does not let the 'evil' pierce into his private life. For Tejban Sing this does not happen in the same way. He is ever ready to make his partial settlements in life. He is so obsessed with power and politics both sexual and general he will not leave any loose end for his approach. Therefore, the goatherd, Beeru, will be dealt with. So he is dealt with.

Kate Millet again explains that like every system of oppression male supremacy rests finally on force, physical power, rape, assault and the threat of assault. A final resource when all else has failed the male resorts to attack. By attacking Beeru, Kunwar Sing serves two purposes. One is to console Ramdin that he is taking actions against the odds and simultaneously keeps the law intact. Second is his personal reason to silence the opponent. This part of dealing with Beeru with force and his uneasiness of being not like him (Beeru) meet at one point where the politics of power coexists with the politics of sex. Tejban's sexual thirst comes out when he noticed Kammo's observation about him as an old person:

One evening Kammo asked him to get rid of those sideburns of his, streaked with silver. "They make you look old," she said. "And you don't like old people," he observed wryly. And then out of the blue, before he could check himself, he added, "Am I as good as the goatherd?" (p.57)

This was very natural for Tejban because earlier when he met first time with Beeru he understood the worth of that twenty fifth year old young lad's credibility to Kammo. Therefore, this thought of being like Beeru haunts him so much and that lasts almost for six months. The torture to Beeru is for suppressing the weakness of Tejban. According to Millet, violence and coercion are used to sustain the stereotyping the female so that the male's control over sexuality is never loosened. Tejban Sing acts here in gratifying his double purposes.

Tejban Sing's political career runs through vicissitudes and his approaches towards them vary at different moments. In the rest of the section until at the end Kammo reappears not as a distinct character, rather as 'information' related to Tejban Sing. Tejban's political career gets mixed with his personal life. He is determined not 'to let himself be flushed down the sink by history'. Tejban Sing finally settles down for Lucknow and Kammo is sent to her parents for she is bearing the second child by Tejban Sing:

He was leaving his house and his lands. Kammo had been sent to her parents for the) delivery of a second child by him. It would be impossible to keep her with him in Lucknow. One had to make one's partial settlements with life. (p.60)

While arguing the state of the women in a male dominated society, Simone de Beauvoir opines that woman has no value or identity by herself-she is defined in relation to the man. Kammo who was the 'woman as demon' in the patriarchal society becomes a mere non-existence in the same male dominated society where it is not only the politics of power that changes rather the politics of sex that dominates the weaker sex, particularly the 'woman'. Woman, for De Beauvoir, becomes mythicised, the subject of male dreams, and idealizations. Cultures all over the world and through history have therefore projected certain qualities onto woman, depending on the masculine need of the moment. Beauvoir argues that the categories in which men think of the world are established from their point of view, as absolute. Woman is considered to be mysterious in essence. Thus the woman becomes associated with life, fragility, purity, beauty, goodness etc on certain occasions. On other occasions, she is evil, seductress, corrupter, promiscuous and death. De Beauvoir argues that such representation enables the man to bestow woman with his fears as well as his desires. For Kammo this happens exactly what Beauvoir stresses in her academic writing.

In the relationship between Tejban and Kammo in Daruwalla's short story one can easily find out the oppression of male over female. Kate Millet, however, at the end of her essay calls for the end of overall violence and then only she believes the oppression will end. As a woman she says:

We are numbers sufficient to alter the course of human history -by changing fundamental values by affecting an entire change of consciousness. We cannot have such a change of consciousness unless we rebuild values---we cannot rebuild values unless we 'restructure personality.' But we cannot do this or solve racial and economic crimes unless we end the oppression of all people- unless we end the idea of violence, of dominance, of power, unless we end the idea of oppression itself -- unless we realize-that a revolution in sexual policy is not only part of but basic to any real change in the quality life. Social and cultural revolution in America and the world depend on a change of consciousness of which a new relationship between the sexes and a new definition of humanity and human personality are an integral part. (Sexual Politics, ch.2).

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