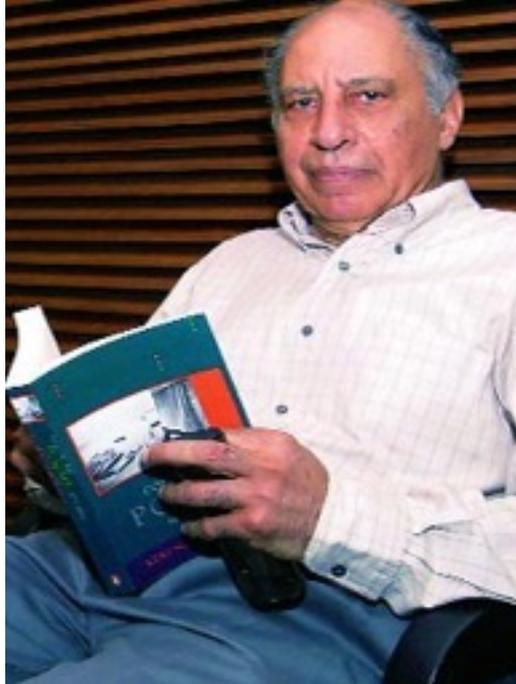


Keki Daruwala

Poet

'There is no happiness in being unattached'

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Keki Daruwala, poet and a former cop.

What does spirituality mean to you?

As an agnostic I am not sure how to answer that question, and for a rational man like me, talking about spirituality is a bit like putting me in a corner. So I certainly have neither credentials nor pretensions in the matter. But I would say that spirituality is a way through the maze, a way through the fog of life. It can give peace, though many so-called spiritual people actually try to fog our minds with a lot of mumbo-jumbo.

Do you believe you are guided and protected by a superior force?

Those who believe in such guidance and protection are lucky. I respect people on the edge of altered states of consciousness for instance, who can have dreams or revelations regarding such a higher force or higher being. Yet, it is not something I have ever experienced and therefore not something I would be able to believe in wholeheartedly.

In fact, I feel restricted by my beliefs: if they were to spill into faith, divinity and all the rest, my inner life would have been much richer. But I would have been fake in doing so, and I would have betrayed who I really am and what I fundamentally think. And I'd rather not be hypocritical. So at times of difficulty, and I did go through some very tragic moments, energy has to be found within. Literature or nature are then tremendous sources of strength and upliftment.

Do you believe you have a special mission or purpose in this life?

I never thought of my life in terms of a mission, but I can say I always tried to conceptualize what is happening around us. As a child, I did not have particular desires or dreams, but since my teenage years, I had this strong urge and compulsion to write. That was the one thing I had to do. Yet, it was obviously not something I could make a living of. I was twenty and there were not so many professional avenues open in North India. A friend suggested I sit for the police service exams and I therefore joined the police for 16 years before moving to Delhi, and working as an intelligence analyst. Basically, I just drifted. There was no clear general purpose or objective.

In the police, I came into contact with the worst side of human beings, and at the beginning I felt very ill-at-ease. Later on though I realized there is a tremendous amount of good one can do there. I guess that only working in hospitals could match it. Also, I developed mechanisms of "compensation" – I began writing more and more, focusing on poetry. It took me quite a few years to come out with anything worthwhile, which happened around 1965. I also wrote for many years on international relations and strategy but lately I have tried to focus on my creative work only, which involves poetry, drama and longer fiction.

What is spirituality for you in your day to day life?

I often feel we should do without many of the rituals we have accumulated over time. But they also become a part of you. So as a Zoroastrian, I do wear the sacred thread, I pray every ten or fifteen days and attend the fire temple for community functions. More importantly, and without being self-righteous, I try to be straight and live within the confines of normal morality. The Zoroastrian credo of "good thoughts, good words and good needs" is a good guide, as I do believe that all of our conduct flows out of our thoughts. Finally, I spend time in nature, as it revives, sustains and strengthens me. The round of seasons tells us that nothing is permanent and that permanence is only the cycle itself. The animal will go, the tree will go, the man will go, but others will come. There is a tremendous inner strength in believing in this kind of cyclic evolution.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

My inspirations in trying to walk through the fog of life have come from literature, from poetry, and from some religious texts such as the Bible or the Mahabharata, and of course Firdausi's Shanama. Though I would often look at myths and religions from a very rational angle, they have taught me much, including Buddhism which has been of particular interest lately.

If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be reincarnated as?

As a traveller, most likely a trekker in the mountains.

If there was one question you could ask God, what would it be?

How did You make the cosmos? Was there really such a thing as the Big Bang? Cosmologists have the flimsiest data about it all, yet display such confidence!

What is your idea of happiness?

I have had a tendency to surround myself with negations, yet I am trying to break through that encirclement. So happiness is about finding contentment. And a fundamental condition for it is a happy family life. I cannot imagine how unattached people could be happy. One cannot be happy by himself. Also, it is important not to have some important guilt for having done something really bad. And fortunately I do not have to bear such a cross.