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NOTES UNIT: III (supplementary-i)

## LOVE ACROSS THE SALT DESERT K.N. Daruwalla

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Author: Keki Naserwanji Daruwalla (K.N.Daruwalla) was born in Lahore in 1937 and was educated at Government College, Ludhiana. At present he is based in New Delhi. His major works of poetry are Under Orion (1970) and Apparition (1971). He also writes short stories.

*Love Across the Salt Desert* is set in the Rann of Kutch, a vast stretch of desert at the India-Pakistan border. Extremely difficult though it is to cross the Rann, smugglers still find a way of crossing it. In such a setting, Daruwalla, weaves a delicate love story that overcome artificial boundaries between countires. Najab Hussain crossed it for a very special reason. He crossed it for his love Fatimah, who lived in the Pakistan village across the Rann of Kutch.

**SUMMARY:** There was a severe drought in Kutch. There had been no rain in it for the last three years. The clouds appeared but they passed by without any shower. It appeared as if the monsoons had forgotten the Kutch region. The land of kutch lay cracked and hard as if baked in a kiln. The cattle became lean and thin and the oxen died. Only the camels were comfortable in that terrible heat and drought.

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Then one day unexpectedly the clouds rolled in and burst into showers. It happened two years ago. But everybody remembers the day, because, it was on this day that Fatimah came to their village. Her coming proved to be auspicious for the region. The drought ended. Here is the story how she came.

Fatimah was the daughter of Kaley Shah a spice seller, in a Pakistan village on the other side of the Rann of Kutch. She was very beautiful. Najab Hussain was known to be a shy young man. He remained lost in his own thoughts and nobody expected any act of bravado from him. Najab was deeply in love with Fatimah. He was prepared to do anything for her, even cross the salt desert all alone.

Najab was only twenty years of age. He had crossed the Rann on four occasions earlier. But he had done so in the company of either his father, Aftab or the cunning smuggler, Zaman. Each time they had smuggled tender leaf into Pakistan and brought back clove and other things to India. Najab noticed that these profits were shared by officials and various middle men.

During one of these trips they had stayed with Kaley Shah, the clove seller. He was an absolute rough. But his daughter Fatimah appeared to be a fairy. She was under pressure to marry

Mahfuz Ali, a worthless fellow. Najab promised that he would be back again to her- this time all alone.

Ever since his return to his village, Najab Hussain had grown restless. He was growing impatient to go to Fatimah. One day Najab set off to cross the desert on his camel, Allaharakha. Before undertaking the journey, he passed his day on the hill-top called Kala Doongar. In the evening he paid homage to the Panchmai Pir. He fed jackals in honour of the Pir. It was considered auspicious if jackals appeared and swallowed the food. He bowed before the flame of the lamp that was lighted in the Pir's honour every night on the hill top. Thus with the name of the Pir on his lips, Najab Hussain set forth to fulfil his promise to cross the Rann and reach his beloved Fatimah. Next morning, it was discovered that he was missing along with his camel, Allaharakha. In those border villages, if a man was absent along with his camel, it was taken for granted that he had crossed into Pakistan to carry on the trade of smuggling. Zamen the Chief of smugglers, was angry because Najab had dared to cross the border without his help. Najab's father, Abtaf also felt angry and disappointed that Najab had gone to Pakistan without taking the bund les of tender leaf.

Aftab went to his wife to break the news of Najab's escapade. He was afraid she might faint. But she received the news calmly. It was clear that she already knew about his son's venture to cross the vast desert. Then Aftab's eye fell on her bare arm. He asked her absent gold bangle that his father had given her. She revealed that she had given it to Najab and that he would soon return with cloves.

Najab had begun his journey in the starlight. His camel, Allaharakha kept a quick pace. Before dawn, he reached Sarbella, twenty miles from Kala Doongar. He had already crosed international boundary. Here he rested. Movement was impossible during the day light. The Indus Rangers would be looking from their bamboo watch-towers. Any movement was sure to be noticed through the binoculars.

Najab drank some water when the sun came up. At noon he had his first meal-dry, stale bread with onion. Then he got lost in his dream of Fatimah. A distant of less than ten miles separated him from her. He felt pained and restless to think that he would have to wait one whole night before meeting her. It was yet daylight when he harnessed his camel to restart the journey. He knew it was madness on his part to move on a day light. He might be noticed by the patrolling parties of the BSF and the Indus Rangers. There was also the danger of the camel dying of the fatigue. The sun was raining flame of heat. But, Najab felts that Fatimah was calling him and he could not deny that call.

Najab crossed the International Boundary Pillar No.1066. He very well knew the track he had to follow. But, as chance would have it, he strayed slightly from his path. The Pakistan Rangers noticed him. They could not tolerate that an Indian should slip into their territory with tender leaf right under their noses and without paying them any hush money. They chased Najab Hussain for a mile and fired

bullets at him. But a dust storm arose between him and his chasers. When the dust settled half an hour later, Najab found himself alone in the Rann.

Najab went on a daze for the next few hours. He feared his camel might die of fatigue. So,to ease him of his burden he started walking beside him. The sand injured his heels. But he hobbled on his toes in the blazing heat of the sun. Then came dusk and Najab waited for the nightfall.

Najab walked for an hour more. At last he was at Fatimah's door. He called out her name softly through the window bars. Fatimah's eyes lit up with joy and excitement to see Najab before her. Two hours before dawn, the beat constable knocked at Kaley Shah's door. He pointed out that a smuggler had come across the Rann. He asked Kaley Shah if he knew anything about him. Kaley Shah assured him that nobody had come to his house.

Next morning when Fatimah took his father's milk to him, She broke to her father the news of Najab's arrival. He had stayed the night in the cattle-shed. Kaley Shah became frightened for a moment. He had a smuggler in his house and the police was looking for him. Kaley shah then met Najab. He was disappointed to know that Najab had not brought any tender leaf. But Najab showed to him his mother's gold bangle. He said he had come to buy cloves and he would pay in gold. Kaley Shah was satisfied. The next two days he kept himself busy buying cloves.

Najab stayed at Kaley Shah's house for two days. He would go into the cattle-shed in the evening but slip into fatimah's room late at night. She told him how her people wanted her to marry Mahfuz Ali. He was a stammerer and Fatimah did not like him. Najab suggested that she should elope with him. Fatimah gave her silent consent to his proposal. They carried out their plan next evening. Fatimah left her country for good. She felt excited at the thought that she was eloping with her lover.

Najab drove that camel hard. By the time they reached Sarbella. Fatimah felt exhausted. She felt asleep. She woke up in the afternoon to find that the sky was covered with clouds. They went on and on during the night. The wind blew sand into their faces. As they neared Najab's village, Khavda, the clouds were thundering. When Najab knocked at his door huge isolated drops of rains were falling. Najab's father Aftab opened the door. He was determined not to show any joy at the return at his erring son. He asked him harshly if he had brought anything. Najab introduced Fatimah and said proudly that he had brought her. Meanwhile it began to rain heavily. The drought that had continued for three years came to an end. The coming of Fatimah proved auspicious for the whole village.

## WORD NOTES:

- 1. Scab
- 2. Emaciated
- 3. Pir
- 4. Thali
- 5. Auspicious
- 6. Vulpine
- 7. Trysts
- 8. Savannahs

- : Dry Crust formed over a wound
  - : Became lean and thin
  - : (Urdu) A Saint
    - : (Hindi) metal plate for serving meal etc.
  - : Favourable sign
  - : of the fox: foxlike
- s : Meetings
  - : Treeless Plain

| 9 | Sere           | : Dried   |
|---|----------------|---|
| 1 | 0. Chagal      | : A leather or canvas water container   |
| 1 | 1. Squander    | : Waste   |
| 1 | 2. Harboured   | : Sheltered   |
| 1 | 3. Tinge       | : Colour  |
| 1 | 4. Mouthing    | : Say; Utter  |
| 1 | 5. Hoor        | : (Urdu) fairy; as beautiful as fairy   |
| 1 | 6. Elicit      | : Draw out  |
| 1 | 7. Grotesque   | : Absurd  |
| 1 | 8. Straining   | : Worrying and making effort  |
| 1 | 9. Sulking :   | Resentful silence   |
| 2 | 0. Chagrin     | : Great irritation  |
| 2 | 1. Crouching   | : Sitting in fear   |
| 2 | 2. Shambling   | : Walking, moving unsteadily  |
| 2 | 3. Mirage      | : Illusory appearance specially of water in desert                              |
| 2 | 4. Writhe      | : Twist and turn in pain  |
| 2 | 5. Fatigue     | : extreme tiredness   |
| 2 | 6. Succumbed   | : Surrendered or yielded to a desire  |
| 2 | 7. Lumbering   | : Moving in clumsy manner<br>: going back<br>: Long journey<br>: Outer boundary |
|   | 8. Receding    | : going back  |
|   | 9. Odyssey     | : Long journey  |
|   | 0. Outskirts   | : Outer boundary  |
| 3 | 1. Sandpapered | : Polished away like sand paper polishes rough                                  |
|   | antique        | surface wood Away   |
| 3 | 32. Nimbus     | surface wood Away<br>: Rain bearing cloud                                       |
|   | Emered Gove    | : Rain bearing cloud  |