

THE POETIC VISION IN THE LANDSCAPE IMAGERIES OF DARUWALLA

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Abstract:

Life is in the verge of morbid and murky realities in which pangs of disease and death are perpetual experiences; Death is the ultimate reality and is the way to freedom from such a life; and Nature is the life force to its creatures which can be further seen as the omnipresent reality. The landscape imageries in the poetry of Daruwalla projects all these aspects of the world view of the poet. As a realist, his landscape imageries are very much rooted on the earth which has local proof to every natural landscape and so also are the urban landscapes. This paper intends to explore the landscape imageries in some of his selected poems, side by side tries to discern the vision of the poet giving an understanding of the poetic endeavour.

Key Words: Death, Imagery, Landscape, Life, Nature, Vision.

Introduction

The landscape, in short, is not a totality that you or anyone else can look at, it is rather the world in which we stand in taking up a point of view on our surroundings. And it is within the context of this attentive involvement in the landscape that the human imagination gets to work in fashioning ideas about it (Ebbatson 8).

In literature, understanding of the concept landscape is not as simple as it seems. Generally, it is understood as those portions of physical environment which are visible. And in literature it is the depiction of those elements of nature in words. The source is the nature itself, but, the landscape depicted in literature is perhaps not the same as the phenomenon outside. American philosopher Crispin Sartwell says so convincingly about the problem of representation of landscape in art and literature that "The relation of depiction to what it is a depiction of, in virtue of which it is depiction of that item" (Sarapik 188). Hence, the landscape in literature is the product of the nature- culture dialogue and poet is the point where both meet and are synthesised into a discourse.

A necessary fact has to be worth mentioned here is about way nature has been consumed to take a form of landscape. The cultural inclusion is undeniable. However, nature has been perceived differently by different people category and created and recreated with different perception. There is a less probability of the reception of nature as it is. As Stephen Siddall writes ;

This rearranging of nature may perhaps provide a setting for a myth, or idealise a lost world. It may demonstrate nature's power and delicacy, or create shock or wonder. It may give contextual meaning to the characters in the foreground of the story. It may help readers to step aside from the modern world, to slow down their lives, to observe the detail and to connect with the source of life (Siddall 9).

Daruwalla as a Landscape Poet

Beginning with Daruwalla's own statement about his poetry, he writes about the occurrence of landscape imageries in his poetic expression as such;

My poems are rooted in landscape which anchors the poem. The landscape is not merely

there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. It should be the eye of the spiral. I try that poetry relates to the landscape, both on the physical and on the plane of the spirit. For me a riot-stricken town is landscape (Daruwalla. *Two*. 21).

The landscape he magnifies thus can be divided into certain categories as per his framework or setting. Where an image of urban city with its clattering of stones pelted by the violent mobs is portrayed in a poem the image of a river in its different forms visualized in another one. However, between the proximity of earth and sky, life and death, love and separation, beauty and violence, revolves the poetic contemplation of Keki N. Daruwalla. Over a few decades, Indian writing in English has been seeing him as a realist poet. In fact, he is a realist as much as the imageries he portrays are concerned. He chooses a technique thereby repeatedly portraying the frailties that he sees as the evil both to the society and to the nature as well. He thrashes those frailties but rather with a mild irony which he believes can be efficient enough in bringing out the essence of humanity. Madhududan Prasad, one of the eminent critics of Daruwalla's poetry says in justifying its function in making a ground for better future;

Daruwalla does not regard poetry as an instrument of escape, a means of diversion, a consolatory toy; instead, he counts it as essential part of the body of society so that it can function as a witness, an esthetic of revival, a force for change, reorientation, awareness and as part of a tougher and deeper humanism whose concern is to create ground for future betterment (Prasad 147).

Better future of the world for him is not a world of Utopia rather a world full of life where these frailties as social realities are also there only to be ousted again and again. His belief is stringently betrothed to the question he always asks; "Sheering off from nightmare/ how does one steer through a normal world?" (Daruwalla. *Nature*. 5). More to say about his re-description of reality, he tries as far as possible in accumulating all the details of his surrounding landscape including both nature and the human civilization. So, a curfew stricken city mired by the suppressed violence for him is an urban landscape and so are the natural phenomena. Hence, the poems of Daruwalla is replete with the landscape imageries with all their abundance and variability. And it comes inherently into his poetry in a process which, he says, is unavoidable. He says; "I cannot help bringing the landscape into my writing, whether its fiction or whether its poetry- because it is there. If you have an eye for what is around you, the first thing you notice is the landscape" (Daruwalla). Although the incidents and events he depict in his poetry are understood in the first encounter as if he is writing about the day to day incidents like a reporter or a writer of diary, but, a deeper and constant insight into these imageries will reveal the broader vision of the poet.

The development of Daruwalla's poetic vision is a gradual process and owes much to his keen observation of the incidents and happenings that he brings into his poetry. It is gradual because it gets into maturation with his continuing practice of poetry. R. A. Singh also has observed a similar fact about the vision of the poet. As he says assessing his earlier poetry; "In the early poems... there is an immediacy of observation and a felicity of expression, but they lack the extensiveness of consciousness which born out of this large and deep vision." (Singh 9). This earlier immaturity of his vision gets intensified in his later poetry. However, a shadow of his consciousness is seen there from the very beginning of his poetic career which is being directed towards unfolding certain truths about life and death, about nature, and about the world. The consciousness then has gradually been developed into a complete vision that he tries communicating in his poetry through the imageries which are quite real and are the product of his encounter with the landscapes of everyday life. This paper intends to read those landscape imageries, which include both the urban and the nature landscapes, with an intention to decipher his poetic vision.

Vision of Life

The quest for the truth of life brings the poet into a state of realization where he finds the predominance of uncertainty over everything. Life for him is a span of time before death whose reality he sees through the imageries of despair, disillusionment, violence, and disease. Wherever he looks all these

imageries of the world come across his eyes. A modern poet, of course, in a modern time is expected to find these realities as much as to prove his identity and Daruwalla is apt enough in doing so. But, his stance as a modern Indian English poet is quite different from the other modern Indian English poets. The fact that makes him unique among the others is that his poetic consciousness is mature enough to come out of the modernity fall in which all others are struck only in finding their self. And his depiction of such images of the modern world are quite impersonal and are often marked with a mild tone of satire and irony.

Landscape imageries in his poetry vibrantly projects the image of Disillusionment. The poetic consciousness has never been get respite from its effect. The loss of faith, avarice, lust, restlessness are the causes which brings disillusionment to the modern world. The imageries of disillusionment of life has seen spread in many of his poems. His experience in the modern world often leaves him in a bewildered situation. His disillusionment is intensified as he finds himself in a torpid condition of the modernity in which he becomes unable to find its root. This rootlessness becomes his prime concern and the cause of his frustration. His poetry is the result of this conflict between his quest for finding the root of modern man and his inability to do so as he find his feet are withered. In the poem "My Poetry" he writes thus;

But the legs are withered roots
memory has slipped up somewhere
for I don't remember
what hit me in the spine
to turn the legs torpid (Daruwalla 70).

The testimony to his disillusionment is further found in the poem "Nightscape". The poet aptly produces a moving imagery with a mixture of fog, and light. As stock symbols, light can be understood as the transparency and the fog is the mystery or illusion. Hence, when he depicts the landscape of Varanasi where the river Ganga flows to reflect on the human reality, what he finds is unclear to himself. And in disillusionment he is confused with the reality of the city and asks "is this a ridge/black with pine/ rising out of the mists" or "a city in meditation/brooding over a ghostscape." (Daruwalla 99). The disillusionment of the poet is clearly visible in the imageries when he writes;

Votive lights are muzzled in the fog:
Bloodstains on a frosted window.
... The fog on the river is like a loaded raft
which the current cannot move (Daruwalla 98-9)

The poetic self is further disillusioned when he finds the reality of the Varanasi city. Varanasi is considered as the city of Gods. Disillusioned and lost, people often visit there to find solace and to feed their spiritual hunger. But in reality the city is a different one to their expectations. And what the poet finds in such an urban landscape is that

In the street of Lord
the sepia teeth of pandas.
In the street of virginity
the raucous laughter of whores. (Daruwalla 103)

Like disillusionment what reality he finds in his vision of life is the despair self. The poetic consciousness has a keen eye to capture the morbid realities in urban landscape imagery. The world around him is mired by the images of hunger, deception, flattery. In the poem "Curfew in a Riot-torn City" the poet projects a feeling of despair. In a riot stricken city he finds the spread of "blood and fog" over half the town along with all other sort of violence. The situation is so tensed that he wants to get relieved from such a situation but never finds any hope. And he writes;

The starch on your khaki back
turns soggy; the feel of things is queer.
You wish to forget it all,

the riot, the town, the people:
that mass of liquefied flesh
seething in fear (Daruwalla 41).

The despair of the poet is further intensified when he comes across the mired reality of the life affected by the pestilence. It is another reality of the urban landscape imagery. The pestilence has been a reality in India till today. And the images it creates are similar every time. There is dead bodies, there is migration, there is mongrels following the ambulances. Above all the failure of the modernity in eradicating such diseases and the politics to suppress the inability are the factors which make the poet hopeless. So in despair he portrays such a reality in the poem "Pestilence";

the hospital floors are marble white
black bodies dirty them
nurses in white habits
unicef jeeps with white bonnets
doctors with white faces receive them (Daruwalla 44)

These images of despair although a reality of the modern world, his vision of life has some tinge of hope. He always finds a middle way to escape from such realities of the world to make a change for betterment. His hope is very much evident in the poem "Bypass" which projects another reality of urban landscape imagery. He writes;

Now I look for a bypass everywhere-
the black serpent, well-tarred, leaving town
after a mere show of circumambulation,
sliding along the curve and yet not fully round;
leaving the city, shuttered with dogma (Daruwalla 3)

In his vision of life he sees the proofs of violence everywhere. The imageries of violence are depicted with all its horrified reality. It is often seen in the situations like riot and curfew mostly in the urban world. The didactic tone of the poet is evident, such as, in the poem "Gujarat 2002". His didactic voice comes to work while projecting the imagery of violence where the "Killer and killed are one" and where "they speak the same language" but "the vocabulary of guilt" is that pervades everywhere. The situation becomes a unique poetic imagery in the words of the poet. The black smoke mires the city. The blood, dead and dying, and the scattering blood stained newspapers and particles all around is the reality that is magnified to visualize the effect of violence. And the effect of black smoke is projected to heighten the effect of violence that is described as engulfing the city and the combined image of fire, charred smoke and the death here is the poetic exuberance. As he writes;

There's blood on the streets, so many dying and the dead,
that dark-grained newspapers squint with red.
Fire and skin turn into one blinding sheet, and in any weather
life and charred skin will peel together (Daruwalla 24).

Furthermore, the vision of life in his poetry will be incomplete without the imageries of disease and death. The images that reflects the disease are the unpleasant but inescapable realities. Pestilence, famine, and other such mass killer diseases out break once and again. Pestilence has been one of the harsh realities of Indian life which engulfs both the rural and the urban world. It affects in many ways to the life making a deep impact on the citizens. He projects these imageries on a canvas of poetry with the colour of his words to make it in one frame work where the reality and imagination go together. However, the tiny details are magnified in the poem "Pestilence in Nineteenth-century Calcutta" as such;

Bacteria and bacillus thrive in the wells,
Nestled under the spawn beds
And killed. The fires burnt higher,

and the dead went up
like fragments of liturgies
lost in a great wind. (Daruwalla 155)

The imageries that vibrantly portrays the effect of pestilence are seen in the poem "Pestilence". The situation is further intensified with the depiction of the images in which he gives a picture of people carrying the diseased people in the palanquin or on the string beds to the hospitals. And the conditions of the affected bodies as frozen, delirious, drained, supine are the product of close scrutiny of the situation by the poet himself. So, he writes

They are palanquin-bearers of a different sort
on the string-beds they carry
no henna-smeared brides.
Prone upon them are frail bodies
frozen bodies delirious bodies
some drained of fever and sap
some moving others supine
transfixed under the sun (Daruwalla 43).

The poetic self finds the images of disease as if spread all over the country. It finds its presence also in the sacred places where people go for a spiritual quest. Such a place is Varanasi where the stern reality of the dilapidated condition of country is avidly visible. The religious aspirants come here with an insatiable quest of salvation. But, he finds the lepers, dwarfs along the cause ways of Ganga. As he writes about the reality of the place;

Lepers huddle along the causeways
like stunted shrubs
black with frost-burns.
A thin dwarf,
...cavorts ape-like. Overhead the monkeys gibber (Daruwalla 100).

In addition to all these imageries of life, the imageries of death makes his poetry more appealing. He always finds the essence of life not without the presence of death. Life's certainty lies only in the death and except it everything is uncertain and unreal. This vision is the core of his poetic vision which he repeatedly portrays time and again. About the uncertainties in life, he sees emotions shattered, passions hewn, desires suppressed. Hence, he writes in the poem "Suddenly the Tree" about this uncertainty of life over which broods the omnipresent death. All the hopes, desires and passions are thus meaningless life whose ultimate finality is the death. Thus he writes;

Perhaps with the rains
green may return to the slopes,
a little moss here, a little grass there;
you never know though,
the rain may never come
or life may run out before the rains-
the almond blossom, each petal soft as an eyelid,
will also not see the rain (Daruwalla 18).

However, the life for the poet is full of such unpleasant realities. Of course, there is an optimistic side of the poet which he keeps unsaid as his is the intermittent belief on the hope towards bringing the human life to a better state devoid of all such murky and violent imageries. It can also be said that, this very intention of the poet is the inspiration behind his writing and he happily accepts this responsibility to make his readers aware about this reality.

Vision of the Nature

Nature is found everywhere in his poetic imagination. And its presence in his poetry is found mostly in the form of landscapes. The landscapes he portrays give a glimpse about his perception of the natural world. His realisation of nature's magnanimity is sharply reflected in his imageries. As a sensible man, the source of his sensibility is the nature itself. He is well aware about the workings of the nature. And of course, this awareness makes him realize the human weaknesses which he often attacks in his poetry. Nevertheless such an awareness of the nature's magnanimity, he realize his limitations and inability in deciphering all its complexities. Such a realisation makes him humble towards the nature. He feels nature; its omnipresence, its magnanimity, its energy or power, its soothing or healing nature, its beauty, and above all its richness.

The beauty and the magnanimity of the nature is portrayed with all its awe and wonder. Its magnanimity is glorified in its vastness of appearance in the forms of sky, ocean, mountains and other such forms. The beauty of the magnanimous nature thus has been localized in his poetry. In the poems like "Ruminations at Verinag," "Chinar", "Crossing Charhoti" and "From the Snows in the Ranikhet", "The Ghaghra in Spate", and "Shiva: at Timarsian" the beauty of the physical places is depicted to appeal the senses of the reader. In the poem "Ruminations at Verinag" the vibrant beauty of the place is depicted with such a keen interest that the mustard stalks across the road and the meadows of the pear groves are transcended to add the beauty. The focus on the tiny details testify to the fact that the poet has a sheer eye towards the reality. However, when he goes on portray the vastness of the landscapes of the place, this also is not so far from the reality. The place is such a beautiful one, it leaves the viewer mesmerized at the least for a moment. And Daruwalla's projection of such beauty of the place with the words also does the same. As he writes;

The Skyline
hugs the valley from root to mouth
and from the south
to its northern tip, a sense of space, the sight
of terraced water mixed with murky light (Daruwalla 205)

In the poem "Shiva: at Timarsian" the description of the physical landscape is somewhat correlated to the theme of the poem. As the poem focuses on the spiritual significance of the Timarsian because of the presence of lord Shiva there, the landscape also enhance the focus by its mesmerized beauty which can bring the worshipers as if they are inebriated by the nicotine. And only except the vibration of the blue sky as it reflected upon the blue water everything else is in the deep meditation like that of lord Shiva. In this physical landscape the thought also can become a hermit. Such is the mesmerized beauty of the place well observed by a meditated mind of the poet. So he writes;

Around you austerity,
the grey of nicotine stains
all landscape of slate
where thought turns hermit
only the sky a vibration
upon blue vibration (Daruwalla 51)

The magnanimity of the nature is further perceived in many other poems. Nature only can bring change to its appearance if it wants so. So the leafs are green at times and sometimes it is yellow and grey, water is blue in ocean and in the river it becomes of many colours. In the poem "The Ghaghra in Spate" the poet gives an aerial view of the river landscape. As he writes;

In the afternoon she is a grey smudge
exploring a grey canvas.
When dusk reaches her

through an overhang of cloud
 she is overstewed coffee.
 At night she is a red weal
 across the spine of the land (Daruwalla 78-9)

The vision of the poet about the nature time and again brings us its mystic characteristic. In the poem “Shiva: at Timarsian” the poet uses such a tool like myth to depict the reach complexity of the natural landscape. In this poem he depicts both nature and the image of the god together in a complimentary manner. Thus in portraying an imagery of nature, he blends the attribution of lord Shiva with the physical appearance of natural landscape in reciprocity. As he writes;

Lord of stalactite
 I have seen
 icicles growing from your tonsure. (Daruwalla 51)

Continuing in his effort in depicting the nature and the god in such reciprocity, he described crags as rock temples and the lava that the mountain thrusts are depicted as the divine orgasm of the *Tandava*. So, he writes;

The crags here are rock temples
 ...rearing from frozen landslides.
 Perhaps I overreach, but thrust of lava that formed them was yours,
 some side-flicker from the divine
 orgasm of *Tandava* (Daruwalla 51).

His vision of nature is further intensified in the landscape imageries in which he brings the reality of the relation of between the nature and the human world in a wilder tone. It is strange that the same river which provides life force since the first life on the earth becomes dreadful and threat to the life at times but it is a reality unavoidable. The very instance of such a characteristic of nature that projects its beauty with an emanating violence can be seen in the imageries of flood, cyclone and other such misbalance of natural forces. When the flood is emanating, its appearance often puts the people into an enchanted state that they hardly escape the bondage of nature's enchanting spell. This mesmerizing beauty can be observed when in the poem “The Ghaghra in Spate” the water engulfs the green paddy fields upon which the reflections of the tilted trees, kingfishers, and gulls can be observed like a painted landscape. Hence, when he writes;

Driving at dusk you wouldn't know
 there's a flood 'on',
 the landscape is so superbly equipoised-
 rice-shoots pricking through
 a stretch of water and light
 spiked shadows
 inverted trees
 kingfishers, gulls (Daruwalla 79).

And surrounded by water upon which the twilight stars reflects, the road seems like a black stretch towards infinity. The fact about the projection of such a beautiful and real looking landscape in his poetry is that it must be followed by the projection of 'violence' of natural forces. And its testimony is validated when suddenly at the night fall, the flood brings havoc. and within a few minutes when such a nightmare spins “fear turns phantasmal/as half a street goes churning in the river-belly” (Daruwalla 79).

Another instance of the amalgamation of beauty and violence in nature can be seen in the imageries of cyclone. In depicting a sea side landscape, the poet has goes on portraying the reality at the site which mires his own desire of beauty of the site. It is quite obvious to the poetic realization that cyclone in a sea is a regular occurrence. But the romantic hope of the poet about the aftermath of the cyclone is what makes him into realize that even in violence nature has the capability to laugh at every human desire. This vision

about the nature is depicted in the poem "Mandwa" by the contrasting images of human hope and the subsequent failure by the nature. So, when he wakes after the storm filled night, he writes;

I felt cheated in the morning.
No canting masts, no shattered spars
Cluttered the beach...
I should have dreamt
of blood-red sails, sunken ships
twisted, skeletal ghost-sailors (Daruwalla 194)

However, in all these imageries of nature, the poetic vision is quite clear. The nature for him is the essence of the life on the earth. It can lead the life the way it wants. Amid this richness and complexity of the nature the human mind is a mere object which is capable of perceiving such richness only to a certain extent. The beauty and the violence are only the different perceptions by the human imagination. But, this relationship between man and nature is the essence of human life in the world and also of the poetry of Daruwalla. M. K. Naik, one of the eminent critics of Indian English Literature, thus writes about his poetry;

Daruwalla's mind is continually busy in establishing meaningful relationship between nature and man, in various ways and in different contexts and it is on the working out of these relationships that the success and the failure of these poems would appear to hinge" (Naik 65).

Vision of Death

Death is a predominant theme in the poetry of Daruwalla. It is also in the core of his poetic vision. He feels its presence in everywhere whose reflections he finds in the human and the natural world. In his vision, death has been seen with all its diverse forms. As the only certainty of all the living creatures its presence can be observed all over the world with all its diversity, intensity, ugliness, and with all its beauty.

Although abstract in itself, death can be visible in diverse forms in the real world. Daruwalla's keen eye somehow is successful in capturing it in the imageries of the landscape. So, at times, he sees death in the form of a hawk: "Looking up into the well of the sky/I saw the hawk, riding an ascending wind, /as he drilled the sky." (Daruwalla 151) and at the other times it is a jackal: "I look for hairline fractures on the glass panes/as the wail of the jackals/riding the wind/crackles against the windows" (Daruwalla 170). However, the truth which Daruwalla understands about death is that it is sudden and predatory. It consistently hovers above over the life and plunges at instantly without even the prior notice of its subject. As in the poem "Suddenly the Tree" he writes"

In twig-nested
and sparse-leaved
November
the nest
against the dusk
glowers...
Overhead the mother kite
keens
circling anxiously. (Daruwalla 129)

Death sometimes becomes ugly in its appearance. Attributing ugliness to the appearance of death is a result of the human perspective. Because, death is indomitable and it works on its own law of nature and the image of ugliness is because of the presence of the human weaknesses. All these weaknesses comes at the time death approaches. In the poem "Pestilence" he depicts the ugliness of death as the images of people dying surround him replete the poem. It is so intense and widespread as if the black feet of the death dominates everybody; 'brown shoulders', 'black shoulders', 'shoulders round as orbs'. And everywhere he

sees people carrying the dying lives with 'frail bodies', 'frozen bodies', and 'delirious bodies' on their shoulders with the hope to revive them to which death falters at the end. So portraying such an image of death he writes;

they are palanquin-bearers of a different sort
on the string-beds they carry
no henna-smeared brides,
prone upon them are frail bodies
frozen bodies delirious bodies
some drained of fever and sap
some moving others supine
transfixed under the sun (Daruwalla 43)

Daruwalla's vision of the world is splintered where disease and death are the everyday realities. But what he intends by projecting such imageries through his poetry is to bring the humanity out of such despair. So, he juxtaposed the imageries through which he tries to reveal the beautiful side of the death. What he wants to convey is that the beauty of death is also lies in the very fact of dying. So, in the poem "Chinar" he depicts the beauty of death through the imagery of golden leaves falling from the chinar tree projecting a beautiful landscape to communicate his vision of death. As he writes;

The chinar confronts the sunset
with its own dusk.
You cannot hear the drip of crinkled leaf.
Isn't this what they call dry rain,
this slow, twisting dead-moth descent
from the sapless branch (Daruwalla 206).

He senses the beauty of death and considers it as a state of utmost freedom from the mundane world. Quite contradictory to the human desire for the immortality which often brings the all forms of pangs and sufferings, he portrays the reality of death as if he is in a different plane. So, when he comes across such a scene in the ashore of river Ganga where he finds the beauty of the death he writes it in the poem "Boat-ride Along the Ganga";

Behind the heat-haze rising from the fires,
objects shimmer, dance, levitate.
You face reality in a different place
where death vibrates behind a veil of fire.
There is no lament. No one journeys here
to end up beating his breasts (Daruwalla 97).

Conclusion

As much as his landscape imageries are concerned they all come from an imagination of experiences that the poet has gathered from his surrounding locale. S. C. Narula, one of his critics, says about the images in his poetry that "These images that repeatedly emphasized the splintered world of humans and nature must be considered constituent of the observed reality, unexpectedly transformed into the reality of his poetic vision. Thus in his poems what seems to begin a simple description of a scene ends up by affording a glimpse of the unchanging reality of which human life and its going-on, at every level of existence are mere local action" (Narula 162). The fact about his poetry is that the experiences he portrayed through the imageries are transcended to a meaning deeper than it seems from the surface. These imageries effectively reveals the vision of the poet regarding life, death and above all the world. In his vision of life, its reality lies in the verge of morbid experiences. Although, he is optimistic in his vision, his optimism arises out of these murky and morbid images of the world. Death, disease and struggle are the inescapable truths in life. Furthermore, his vision of nature lies in his acceptance of nature as the greater force in the

world. It is the life force, it is beautiful, and it is violent. The life exists with only a mutual correlation between nature and life. And at last, about death, he visualizes it as a way towards freedom from the ethereal world despite its murky inevitability. The landscape imageries vibrantly reveal these visions of the poet.

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