**THE DOLPHINS**

‘The Dolphins’ by the Scottish poet and playwright Carol Ann Duffy is a poem about dolphins and spoken (as if) by a dolphin. The dolphin speaks about its past life in the sea in comparison to its present life where it is confined with others in a pool. The poem is written in the form of a monologue where the dolphin speaks out its heart though the gender of the dolphin is not clear here in. The poem is written without a proper rhyme scheme and the poet, in the voice of a dolphin gives vent to the feelings that the dolphins who are confined in artificial pools to entertain human beings, suffer from. The dolphin speaks as an individual but the use of ‘we’ suggests that it speaks for the entire dolphin community and somewhere its depressed words echo the same feeling of all those animals whether aquatic mammals like dolphins, or terrestrial mammals like the tigers or lions et al or even the ornithological creatures like the dove or parrot among others who are enslaved by the human beings in some way or the other to act entertain them.

From the technical point of view the poem is written without any proper rhyme scheme and hence appears to be written in blank verse/verse libre but without the continuation of iambic pentameters. Few lines of the poem appear suggestive than explicitly clear as ‘We were blessed and we are not blessed’ and again ‘It is the same space and always above it is the man’. There is example of Simile in the poem as in ‘We see our silver skin flash by like memory’ and Metaphor too as in ‘We circle well-worn grooves/of water on a single note’. There are examples of Enjambment in the poem too as in ‘After travelling such space for days we began/to translate’. Then there is example of Alliteration too – ‘…. Will not deepen to dream in’. There are examples of Repetition too as in ‘We were blessed and now we are not blessed’ and ‘And now we are no longer blessed’ and again ‘There is a man and there are hoops’ and ‘There is a man and our mind knows we will die here’. The Tone of the poem is not only depressing but there is underneath that feeling of hopelessness because of the presence of man and here in the poet seems to be hinting at the relation between the man and the dolphin as that between the exploiter and exploited. From the thematic point of view the poem deals with the oppression and captivity the dolphins suffer only because of the human beings and this is what a dolphin speaks out firstly in second person (singular/plural) ‘World is what you swim in, or dance, it is simple’; and in the rest of the poem is written in first person plural. The entire poem is about the oppression and exploitation meted out to these aquatic mammals by the human beings and hence the title of the poem ‘The Dolphins’ is apt and justified.

In the very first line of the poem the dolphin addresses us that is the human beings as ‘you’ and says that it is the world where we swim in or dance and that is quite simple. It is through ‘you’ that the dolphin not only speaks about us and the world we live in but the world that he and his fraternity belong to, that is the sea where they have the liberty to swim as well as dance. In the second line it says that despite being in their elements they are not free that is despite being in water which is their ‘element’ they are not free. The fact of not being free insinuates that they are confined in some pool or aquarium. The third line shows that ‘outside this world’ that is out of water they cannot breathe for long and this is why they have been provided with their natural habitat to make them survive. It is perhaps the compulsion of the human beings to keep them alive that has made them keep the dolphins in an artificial water body. (Otherwise they would not have cared to provide them with water body even). The dolphin that speaks out its heart is not alone but there is another one who has a similar shape and movement and thoughts that are similar too. (There is some ambiguity in the line ‘The other’s movement forms my thoughts’ as the other here might be the man whose movement or instructions forms its thoughts). The dolphin, in its enslaved state notices a man, probably the owner of the aquarium/pool or the person responsible to train it, since he has hoops that is a circular band of metal in his hands, used to make the dolphin jump through it. The first stanza ends with ‘There is a constant flow of guilt’. This line might be interpreted in two ways; firstly it is the constant flow of guilt of human beings for having enslaved the dolphins in such a condition and making them do according to their will. Again it might be the constant flow of guilt that is imposed upon the dolphin for not being able to perform according to the instruction of the instructor.

In the second stanza the dolphin says that it has found no truth in the waters of the place it has been kept confined. Being extremely sensitive/sentient creatures they find that the water of the pool or the aquarium to be unlike the habitat they are accustomed to. The skin doesn’t give any signal that it is stimulated by the water of the pool and though it is water- the same element, the confined water body lacks that expansive freedom offered by the ocean/sea. It is actually the natural thing that the dolphin craves for and misses in the artificial pool. Hence in this artificiality there is no ‘tremble on our flesh’. The voice of the dolphin as if resonates with its deep felt grief and depression as it says that in their earlier life in the wide and deep ocean they had a blessed life but now in this confined body full of water they feel no more blessed. Thus, it might be (inferred)/interpreted that despite the assurance of food and care in this pool or aquarium the dolphin doesn’t consider this life to be blessed, rather yearns for the life in the ocean where it had to search for its own food and take care of itself. Such confinement along with a condition where there is no freedom can’t be acceptable to anyone, even to those human beings who have enslaved these aquatic mammals. The next line reveals that the dolphins, after roaming in the wide, open sea have now learnt to ‘translate’ that is have learnt to accept this change of environment as inevitable or accept the change as their fate but only after ‘travelling such space for several days. This is actually a change in mindset that the dolphins have endeavoured to bring about since they have no choice but to remain in this confined water body and serve human beings. By ‘It was the same space’ and ‘It is the same space’ the dolphin indicates that their natural habitat had been water and it is till water but the difference with their past is that presently ‘the man’ is above that ‘same space’. Given that the past and the present space are not the same (past being the sea and the present being the pool) the space factor might not differ so far as being in water is concerned but it is the figurative presence of man everywhere acting as the abductor and consequent exploiter. It is thus the man who makes the difference and though they are in water from the past to the present, they are made to live and behave according to the will of the human beings.

The third stanza begins with the dolphin repeating its perception that they are no more blessed since the world they are in (i.e. the pool or the aquarium) would no more deepen like the sea to aid them to dream in it. The dolphin here in also speaks of its companion who feels the same.

Thus, it is the space along with its expanse and depth that the dolphin yearns for. Here is the message of solidarity and fraternal feeling as one dolphin feels for the other and it is their mutual helplessness that brings them closer besides their belonging to the same species. It is their compassion and sympathy for each other that help them come closer and collectively face the adverse situation they have been thrust into. The lesson that the aquatic mammals give us here is one of mutual empathy and a feeling of togetherness. The light of the sun (the bright luminary above) or even the electric lights make their skin flash with a slivery appearance and this immediately reminds them of their past when they moved about in the sea and their skin shone in the same manner with the sunlight reflecting on them. The remembrance of the past is presented with the help of a simile ‘We see our skin flash by like memory of somewhere else’ and this evinces how astutely dolphins are aware of their bodily knowledge. Soon after the dolphin remembers the duty it has to perform and this to balance a coloured ball till ‘the man’ that is their master/instructor goes away. All this is to be done for human entertainment and the dolphins, like many other hapless animals are forced to act according to the will of their masters/instructors.

The fourth stanza presents utmost confinement, desolation, hopelessness and resignation. In the open sea and ocean it had the liberty to circle in and around the reflection of the moon/(the soft luminary) but here, in the pool or the aquarium it is deprived of that view; hence ‘The moon has disappeared’. Here they have to circle ‘well-worn grooves of water’ on a single note that is the sound of some music or whistle. The next line once more speaks of mutual empathy as the dolphin says that the music of loss that is the loss of freedom that is to be there in their lives forever is passed/transported from the heart of the other dolphin to its. And it is this music of loss that transforms its heart to stone that is hardens it to face the eventuality. The next two sentences are seemingly disjointed simple sentences but deep inside they are related. In the first sentence the dolphin declares that there is a plastic toy and in the second sentence there is the admission that there is no hope. The plastic toy is there for the dolphins to play and be engaged but it is no source of joy for them bereft of freedom and hence they find no hope of getting back to their original habitat from this confinement, thus the expression of hopelessness becomes all the more poignant as the plastic toy stands as the symbol of artificiality imposed upon them. They have to sink to the limits of ‘this pool’ that is the pool created by the human beings and having reached the limit or the lowest part is just an action done in accordance to the wish of the master/instructor and this is done till the whistle is blown signaling them to come up. Thus it is within the limits of the pool that they have to move and that too in accordance to the instruction of the trainer/master/instructor, this limited life is quite in contrast to the limitless expanse of the ocean where they used to move and enjoy. Metaphorically they sink to the limits of their hopelessness until someone comes to save them, their messiah. The sense of submission and resignation is very much perceptible here because the cause behind their limited and confined life is none other than ‘man’. Having gone through this ordeal/tough situation and constantly trying to adapt to this enforced artificial life the dolphin feels that they would die here only. It is as if a premonition that it is having and that sums up the acute suffering that the dolphins have to go through in a manmade and limited world where they have to live to please and entertain man at the expense/cost of their own joy and freedom. The pathetically helpless condition of the dolphins indirectly appeals to the readers and humanity at large to stop using dolphins in particular and animals in general for their entertainment and let them be free. (anti-speciecism).

**MEANINGS:-**

Monologue- a long, tedious speech by one person during a conversation.

Fraternity- friendship and mutual support within a group.

Insinuates- suggest or hint (something bad) in an indirect way

Ambiguity- the quality of being open to more than one interpretation; inexactness.

Yearns- have an intense feeling of longing for something

Endeavoured- try hard to do or achieve something.

Solidarity- unity or agreement of feeling or action

Astutely- accurately assessing situations or people

Hapless- unfortunate.

Desolation- a state of complete emptiness or destruction.

Empathy- the ability to understand and share the feelings of another

Poignant- evoking a keen sense of sadness or regret.

Premonition- a strong feeling that something is about to happen, especially something unpleasant.