

Voice of the Muffled Thoughts: Shiv K Kumar

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Abstract: *Postmodern Indian literature is well observed for innovative themes and individual style of presentation, the writers of this era separated them with the monotony of presentation, selecting themes and in following the old mannerism in style and language. It is much obvious in the writings of Nissim Ezekiel, Kamla Das, A K Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Keki N Daruwallah and so in Shiv K Kumar's. These writers chose every possible and probable aspect of life, landscape, environment, beauty, society, religion, and superstition. They made special to very ordinary themes and movements of daily life. Their works are steps to give a promising place and position to some very common but special feels, forms, and thoughts of everyday life by giving utmost depth and intensity. This doesn't represent that these postmodern poets have ignored main concerns of poetry or main path of verses which follow nature, landscape, beauty, society and etc. it can be said for them that walking in this path they have picked some untouched, rare and versatile content and proven their individuality in selection as well in portrayal of these. This paper will overview the theme of feminism in this time specially in the presentation of love, sex and beauty in the Poems of Shiv K Kumar, who is an obvious figure in portrayal of bold and hidden aspects of woman's life, which they are not supposed to share or acknowledged with anyone; this paper will grow a view that how Kumar as a true feminist became outspoken for the muffled voice of women through his poems*

Keywords: *Postmodern Indian literature*

I. INTRODUCTION

R Shankar states in his book *Shiv K Kumar's poetry, Imagery and Symbolism* 'The themes on love and sex, marriage, family relations and cultural interactions are predominant in his poetry. Futility and frustrations are more conspicuous than facile cheerfulness and optimism.' (p 60)

Shiv K Kumar a poet with a versatile figure and incredible features was born in a Hindu family in Lahore on 16th August 1921 thus faced the horror and grief of partition, with so many consequences of it. A poet, an educationalist with huge achievements in literature, translations, academics, and winner of the reputed Sahitya Academy Award for his book of verses *Trapfalls in the Sky*, had almost fourteen collections of Poetry, Novels, Stories, Translations and Anthologies, better known for his straightforward and brave attitude of taking themes and their picturization.

Shiv K Kumar among these contemporary poets dared to write on the unidentified and unvalued melodies into leading themes. Womanhood, beauty, love, sex, frustration, separation was the widely looked themes in this era, Kumar dragged many subthemes related to womanhood, when he writes about the discussion of a Mother to her daughter before her marriage, and a women waiting for her men at village well, about the menstrual process of women even he writes freely about the limitation of womanhood. We will look here the wide aspects and Kumar's articulations for female with an expertise in giving words to some silent sounds of their life. As said aptly about him in K V Dominics, *Discourse on Contemporary Indian English Poets*, "Kumar seems to invert the conventional role of women and depicts them as aggressive, violent, and dominant personality. In other words, she is represented as possessing all the qualities conventionally attributed to male." (p133) He has never attempted to attach or highlight divine beauty or godly traits of women, his poems on women are epitome of their beauty but physical and realistic terms.

The voice of feminism which we frequently hear today is not actually as new as it seems, it was discussed earlier and well versed with all possible use of symbols and imagery in a very decent manner in the poems of Shiv K Kumar. Kumar faced many tragedies in his life related to marriage, love, and attachments, thus in his representation of these

themes, a sense of confession can be seen. Sometimes the reader feels, as in his poems Kumar himself is murmuring, reciting miseries of his life.

A. N. Dwivedi says in this regard, “Love and sex, marriage, family relations and cultural interaction are among the dominant themes of Kumar’s poetry.” (183) This frustration of love and sex of a woman is brought out by using nature and landscape imagery in “Kovalam Beach”, “Reclamation”, “A Dry River Bed”, “Parting” etc.

Strong desire for love and beauty as a counterpoint to scarcity is utterly expressed in “The Face”, and at times it ruptures out in full flow:

Down your shell-involuted ears,
plunges my forked tongue,
only to hear the echoes of the flood
heralding a new cycle of life. (*Art*, 14)

Some other poems as “Sounds of Hunger” reveal the same feeling less passionately specifically in feminine context:

The other hunger forges,
for silken thighs,
swishing past,
beyond accessibility. (*Art*, 21)

Female characters in Kumar’s poetry are gifted with the patient and elegance. For instance, a wife’s anguish when she found a love letter of her husband with a ‘pair of roughed lips’ has been explored in the poem, “Love Letter”. She shows her love and jealousy both when she thinks, ‘What’s it that one woman has/and the other hasn’t?’ thus in this poem, poet has touched intensity of love and carefulness of a woman to his lover.

It is one such poem which embodies his poetic vision, along with the remark of paradoxical nature of the persona. Further he simply asks a question, “What’s it that one woman has/And the other hasn’t?”, and he dramatically explores the reality. The image of ‘bloated scorpions’ symbolizes the horror of the mind which comes out through the shape of ‘a grotesque dwarf’.

The same feeling is disclosed in “Eve’s Pregnancy”, “A Love Poem”, he writes in “A Love Poem”:

I have poured the whispering of
my love into your ears.
Your mouth is a segment of
a tangerine—its colour, aroma and nectar.
My tongue aches to explore
The dark caverns to the epicenter of your being. (*Where*, 9-13, 30)

The poem presents a beautiful gallery of images, ‘eyes to their depths’, ‘My tongue aches to explore’, ‘the dark caverns’ to the ‘epicenter of your being’ and ‘arched like a gazelle’s’ to represent intensity of love.

Kumar similarly, shows his excel of employing images and symbols of love and sex in the next poem and reveals ironically to the men folk in through “An Indian Mother’s Advice to Daughter Before Marriage”. In this poem an Indian mother is giving lessons of married life to her daughter where she must surrender herself completely to her husband it may give her serene delight of pure love:

Don’t ever argue
at the moment of surrender
for the end is ineluctable. So move in
with moonshine on your face and quick
of the sun between your thighs. (*Which*, 6-10, 66)

This poem also produces painful experiences of Indian wives who have to follow wishes of their husband by ‘giving up all their hoardings before dying’ and when their husbands are ‘out fishing down the dark/river’ they have to pass this time patiently because this lonely time is a gift. There is a dual irony in some lines of the poem on the one hand Kumar depicts physical torture of a wife by her husband and predictable betrayal and apathy of the male on the other hand, because:

A man’s memory is myopic,
Like a sparrow’s; once filled up,

He hardens into a bedrock. (*Trap, 16-18*)

Further in the poem, he uses images like 'fishing down' in the 'dark river' to present diverse, situations of life and 'the moment of surrender' to offer her to his man and 'his appetite' is used to show sexual desire of a man.

Shiv K. Kumar provides sufficient scope to the representation of erotic images in his poetry. He touches upon various related aspects such as womanly charm, marriage, divorce, betrayal, promiscuity and prostitution in order to depict attraction between sexes, arousal of sexual desire and sexual union. Nevertheless, his depiction of erotic situations, scenes, images and ideas shows his intention to reach the higher objective of understanding human nature for the self and society.

Shiv K. Kumar reflects the idea as he shows his awareness to a new language that is 'the language of body' and employs it for 'a full exposure of body and mind'. Kumar widely employs the technique of expressing the woman's beauty in several poems; an instance is the sketch of the archetype of woman "Eve" in the poem "Birth of Eve". Here Eve is depicted as a highly sensuous figure; her 'two shoulders' are like 'mute doves', 'lips' are like 'two petals peeled off a gold cup' and 'eyes' that 'spellbind a pansy'. (*Trap, 71*)

Through the description of Eve's beauty the poet acknowledges the physical excellence of woman and accepts that it is this carnal perfection that enacts as a 'stimulus': '... crescent of your lips / tempts even muezzin to break up his / fast before moonrise' in the poem "To a Young Beautiful Woman aspiring to be a Poet" (*Wool, 48*). The lines celebrate the sensuous charm of a woman.

Thus Kumar has established himself as a poet who emerges as a humanist for his effusive traits of womanhood, 'love and sex', 'separation', 'super-consciousness' and 'society'. As a poet of his age he has touched and experienced all least feelings, emotions and possible personas of life specifically of women's life which were not touched by any contemporary writer the way Kumar did. He appears as the voice of Indian women's those moments and experiences which were unexplored for the reason of society or they herself. And in the depiction of these traits, he has paid attainments, full honesty and sensibility from the core of his heart; which is visible in each line, stanzas and word of his poems based on female sensibilities and senses. Sometimes Kumar stands as a spokesperson for Indian wives, daughters, beloveds, labours, nurses, prostitutes, and even for many great personas of society he speaks for, such as his mother, Aunt, Begum Akhtar, Sheila (an imaginary character in his poems) and many more women in his craftsmanship find special treatment and place. Women in his poems are in their natural and raw version, he never tried to glorify by drawing spiritual or godly traits of them instead he efforted to present women's desires, temptations, tendencies, sufferings, and dominance although this has never settled them any where laser or smaller than male.

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