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POSTMODERN READING OF SHIV K. KUMAR

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ABSTRACT

After 1980s, India realized itself as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual nation and literature in India after 1980 is described as Postmodern Indian English Literature. It was Nissim Ezekiel who gave Indian English poetry a postmodern aspect and approach with his Letter-Day Psalm(1982). After that a number of poets came to bear that flagship and Shiv k. Kumar was one of them. His contribution bears the stamp of his learning and scholarship. His poetry gave a new shape, a new direction with his various themes like national and cultural heritage, irony, pastiche, hybridity, contemporary reality and situation, human relationship and emotion. Actually Kumar engaged himself to open up new possibilities and a new way of looking towards the world. In this paper I want to highlight his postmodern approach through some of his works.

KEYWORDS: Postmodern, Irony, Satire, Indian sensibility, Spirituality.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of postmodern Indian English Writing is one of the most significant part of Indian English Literature. And among them poetry became one of the best medium through which poets tried to show postmodern Indian sensibilities. If Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children' marks postmodernism in Indian English fiction, the works of Shiv K. Kumar can be said to embody the characteristic of Postmodernism in the last two decades of the twentieth century. With his touch of Indian sensibility he tries to show current situation of contemporary society and adds a new flavour which distinguish his poetry from others. His major poetic collections are Articulate Silences(1970), Cobwebs in the Sun(1974), Subturfuges(1976), Woodpeckers(1979), Trapfalls in the Sky(1987)

Kumar as a postmodern poet describes Indian nature, landscapes with a distinct touch of Indian Sensibility. In his 'Dal Lake: Srinagar' gives a graphic description of Dal lake which is in Srinagar. The poet enjoyed the morning and it is shown in this lines:

It's day break-the moment of embrace
between rose and briar, dream and reality,
faith and negation
. . . . as though this morning has just been midwifed

out of the womb of time." (Dal Lake: Srinagar)

He tries to show India in a new way with his image, perception and poetic genius. His 'O Delhi!' is a telling commentary on Delhi with its past and present condition. He shows the business, boredom of the city and at the same time he is satisfied upon receiving the hospitability of Indian:

...Still I felt redeemed

to welcome indoors a fugitive from another land.

I savoured your hospitability. (O Delhi!)

Kumar attempts to produce the natural treasures of India with unequivocal speciality. When we read 'Cleansing Ganga', a nascent picture of innocence comes before our eyes:

At nativity all creatures are chaste, like breast milk

the downy chick, pecking its way out

To the mother's udders

And the undiapered babe, thumped

And thrashed into primal consciousness. (Cleansing Ganga)

In his 'The Taj', he at a time praised the world class beauty of the Taj Mahal and at the same time he is disappointed with the ongoing time and decay:

now a renovator's nightmare.

How long can it withstand

The riverbed's lethal teeth? (The Taj)

In making a simple scene to an extraordinary one, Kumar is Unsurpassable. In his 'A Letter to My Son', he portrays the climate, surrounding of hyderabad with all its extremes:

To dodge the sun's sanguine eye

Glowering in its lethal anger. (A Letter to My Son)

Kumar's poems on Indian Landscape are merged with Indian sensibility and in these poems he shows contemporary life in our society. India is a religious land and in India, Banaras is the city of religion and holiness. Kumar attempts to show this in his 'Banaras:Winter Morning':

Each tree by the roadside

Smearred with saffron and white ash-

Its roots seeking succor

From the holy waters... (Banaras:Winter Morning)

As a postmodern poet, Kumar also combines or pastes elements of previous genres and styles of literature to create a new narrative voice and comments on the writing of them. This pastiche is often found when we read his 'Lear to Cordelia'. Here Kumar presents a new level of reasoning. On being asked by Lear about love, Cordelia divided her love logically into two parts, one for father and one for her husband. What Kumar shows that love can never be confined between boundaries and barriers:

Come, my dearest, feign

Some movement of the soul

Beyond the empiric point. (Lear to Cordelia)

In some of his poems Kumar makes a close observation on Eastern and Western values and also tries to assimilate it. But at the same time when he compares it with Indian sensibility a sense of objectivity and detachment also come. Actually Kumar tries to show everything about India along with its nature, crowd, sun, dust, poverty and many more. He writes poetry within Indian viewpoint. As a postmodern poet his poetry shows subversion and resistance. Two sections of 'Trapfalls in the Sky' mainly 'Under Alien Skies' and 'Genesis' show this viewpoint.

In his poetry, we also find the picture of Indian women. In 'An Indian Mother's Advice to her daughter before Marriage', he shows how Indian mothers gives advice to their daughters about how to react and balance everything in after marriage life. Another poem 'Indian Women' shows Indian women's love for their husbands. While women of west think waiting is a waste of time, Indian Women can wait till evening for their husbands to return. In India women have to perform her duty carefully towards husband and housework:

Patiently they sit
like empty pitchers
On the mouth of the village well. (Indian Women)

One level he is a pessimist poet and this pessimism comes from the fear of death. He has also written some poems in connection with this fear of death in Woolgathering. He realizes that in life pain, agony will always come and when the situation changes the same agony, pain abide. In this sense he reminds us Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' as in 'Talking to a Bird on my Window-sill', he says that it is impossible for that bird to understand human fate and their problems:

You seem to chirp your way through life-
never a streak of sorrow
in your beady eyes.
You don't know the problems I have to face-
Darkness, rain, nightmares-
Or that cyclone, last year, that uprooted
a tree in my compound, demolishing
a nest that had sheltered my vagrant thoughts. (Talking to a Bird on my Window-sill)

Kumar highlights many aspects, ideas, notions in his poetry. He knows that nature can play a vital role in changing one's destiny because it can sense danger and acts in not a normal way. In his poem 'A Dark Mood' shows the perception of the speaker's mood of thought in contemplation of the dead and nature's resonance to man. Here he makes a comparison as human touch of emotion is compared with the love and pity portrayed by the sea shells on the shore. By seeing the dead body of a man, the woodpecker pecks the bark of a tree more severely. Nature's creatures have turned impatient on seeing the dead body as always death claims more priority:

How can we exchange nudities to night
when the shells on the ocean's bed
are waiting for the dead? (JSAL 62)

Apart from the world of death, Kumar also feels sad when he reveals the secret of sorrow in married life in some of his poems. He gives a delicate touch in every Indian occurrence with his own view, imagination. In his 'Twenty-fifth Wedding Anniversary', he says:

There's the first knock at the door-
they have started to pour in,
each wearing his own anniversary on his painted face
or the night of eternal discord? (Twenty-fifth Wedding Anniversary)

Kumar's 'Woolgathering' is a book of poems where he frees or expresses his creative energy or emotion and wants to create a self identity with the theme of life, love and death. In his 'On Listening to Mozart's Requiem', he declares:

I know when the wind waves its wand,
It's time to give up." (On Listening to Mozart's Requiem)

As a postmodern poet, Kumar made a criticism of life while he stayed in New York. In 'A Letter from New York', he shows the disintegrated, loveless, divorced family of New York. In his 'Days In New York', he tells that one can be happy in India as rules don't abide by the law and one has the right to do as one likes. As he says in 'Days In New York':

Here I live in a garbage can
The pile grows bigger each week
With the broken homes
Splinted all around
I sometimes stop at Grand central to Piss
Where else can one ease one's nerves." (Days In New York)

But it is also necessary to show that Kumar is also an optimist one. He is also a poet of hope, inspiration and towards the end of his poetic career he realizes that nothing can destroy the virtue of a man. In his 'The Ring', the poet questions:

How could virtue be sullied
by a night's brief affair? (The Ring)

The discussion regarding Shiv K. Kumar as a postmodern poet would be incomplete without the discussion of irony and humour in his poems. He uses Irony to make the people think over and also to give a delight to the readers. Actually, "In Shiv K.kumar's poetry historical monuments, a landscape and environment are often viewed with a savage irony as a part of his own sexual desires, anger at incongruities." (King Bruce,120) In his 'O Delhi!', he uses feminine imagery to show the picture of Delhi. By using olfactory image like 'scented', he shows the contaminated society in a humorous way. Here he says:

Your streets and alleyways were like to contours
of a virgin's torso-taut and scented." (O Delhi!)

In his 'I say it on oath, your Lordship', he ironically shows the unhappy marriage and divorce with vivid imagery:

I say it on oath, your Lordship,
that I'll speak the truth
speaking out one' mind in an open court
is always embarrassment
like the wedding kiss
under the priest's direction." (I say it on oath,your Lordship)

In his 'Cleansing Ganga' shows that Ganga is now become polluted and inspite of that Ganga cleans us but actually it is our duty to make the holi river clean from water pollution. By using the virtual imagery he shows that the purity of the soul at time of its birth meanwhile polluted:

It's only when they are carried down the river of time
That iron sinks into their souls." (Cleansing Ganga)

But the poet says that every human beings were innocent at the time of birth. Here the poet ironically says:

At nativity all creatures are chaste, like breast milk
the downy chick, pecking its way out
of the shell's prison.
The littlum calf, gravitating on its tottering lags
To the mother's udders
And the undiapered babe, thumped
And thrased into primal consciousness." (Cleansing Ganga)

Social satire can be seen also in Kumar's poetry and his 'Epitaph on an Indian politician' is best example of that. Here he says:

All his life he shamed around
In homespun yarn
Socializing his soul,
While his sons flourished
In the private sectors of big business
Here he lies, silenced by tongue
Cancer, during the stormy budget session. (Epitaph on an Indian politician)

In his seventh book of verse 'Thus Spake the Buddha', he gains a new knowledge, a new world from personal to impersonal, from subjective to objective. Spiritualism gains control over him and he wants redemption in life. Study of Buddha and Krishna pave the way for him. He realizes the ultimate truth of life, human destiny and one's role in this world. In 'Lord Krishna to Arjuna', he says:

Your destiny was etched on your palm
at birth. Just as it was preordained

that I accompany you,
May be I took the human form solely to commune
With you, as we both find ourselves here
Between two forces, good and evil.
A mentor too realizes himself
Through his disciple, like the creator
Seeing his image in his creation." (Lord Krishna to Arjuna)

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, Kumar's poetry deals with many aspects regarding the subtle fashion of the East and West, religion and sex, the mind and heart, the body and the spirit. A brief analysis of his poems show that in his poems we find many postmodern tendencies and more precisely he has blended and reconciled these qualities in a superb way with Indianness. As Bijay Kumar Das aptly said, "Kumar's poetry with its innovative imagery and learned vocabulary may appear difficult at the surface level but as one dives deep into the deep structure, the hard shell of the coconut gets ruptured, the sweet kernel emerges and satisfies the quench of the reader." (Das, Bijay Kumar, *Postmodern Indian English Literature*, 32-33)

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