

Shiv K. Kumar : A Voice of Postcolonial Era

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Postcolonial Writings as we have observed, emphasize the process of strong resistance in the colonized societies and also put emphasis on contemporary reality of life. It deals with the literature written by the people of colonized countries that take the suffering and survival and resistance of their people as their subject matter. Postcolonial Writings can be considered as the historical marker of the period because it deals the literature which comes after decolonization as well as it is considered as an embodiment of intellectual approaches. At the intellectual level Postcolonial writers engaged themselves in opening up the possibilities of a new language and a new way of looking towards the world. Their writings can be taken as a medium of resistance to the former colonizer. Their themes are focused on the subject matters like identity, national and cultural heritage, hybridity, border crossing, contemporary reality and situation, human relationship and emotions etc.

In the Indian context, Postcolonial writing makes its presence felt in the English-speaking world by giving new themes and techniques. The rise of Postcolonial Indian English writing was a significant aspect of Indian English literature. If we talk about the different genre of Postcolonial Indian English literature, poetry became one of the best mediums for expression. Postcolonial Indian English poets make use of current situation in contemporary society to give their poetry a distinct Indian flavour. They have now become conscious of their own identity and have turned inward, to discover their roots. John Oliver Perry rightly said in this context

The most significant Indian English poetry since early 1970s has turned increasingly towards indigenous themes..... materials and possibly even forms of poetry.¹

If creating new themes and techniques is a part of Postcolonial writing, Shiv K. Kumar can be truly called a Postcolonial poet. Winner of Sahitya Academi Award with various books of poetry, drama, short story and translation, Shiv K. Kumar gave an identity and a sense of direction to Indian English poetry in the Postcolonial period. His knowledge of Indian myths and Indian history is amazing and he uses them as themes in his poetry. And it is in this aspect that his poetry conforms to the norms of Postcolonial literature. But the most appealing aspect of his poetry is that it gives a distinct touch to **Indian sensibility**. Other than this, themes like East-West encounter, Indian landscape, national identity, contemporary reality he takes all these as his themes in his poetry which give the whole essence of **Postcoloniality**. In his Award winning book of verse, *Trapfalls in the Sky* (1987), we can see Kumar's seeking for the national and cultural identity. For instance in his poem, 'A Letter from New York' he, while searching for an identity, mocks at himself and says:

Question Catapult in the air:

Are you Puerto Rican?

A Jamaican? A Red Indian ?
I look for the feathers on my skull,
A band around my forehead
And mumble, No, a brown Indian,
From the land of Gandhi.

(Subterfuges, p.18)

As a Postcolonial poet, Kumar makes an attempt to come to terms with contemporary reality which is integrated with Indian landscape. His poems such as 'Musing in a Park', 'Banaras : Winter Morning', 'Dawnbreak Over Khasi Hills' and 'O Delhi!' are simple at the surface level but at the deep structure level, they make a different meaning.

Kumar's dealing with national and transnational themes indicates his open mind and candid approach towards life. Superstition, injustice, hypocrisy, poverty, double-dealing, failure in married life, and betrayal in life in the contemporary society- all we can see in his poetry. He wanted to expose those who are responsible for the sufferings of layman because suffering in personal life and sufferings in the society at large make him sad.

Like many of the poets of Postcolonial era, Kumar tries to write authentically about the performances of rituals, superstitions prevailing in Indian society. The way some of the people perform ritual without thinking of its result and aftermath, he is against for this. He is in favour of that tradition and ritual which is not hypocritical in its form. According to him a true and genuine religion is that which soothes the mind and the soul and gives moral sensibility. He is not against religion but the evils of religion.

Kumar is considered one the most outstanding poets of Modern Indian English Literature, who has the credit to give the recognition, Modern Indian poets got in the world of English Literature. He is a versatile genius who combined in himself various aspects of a writer. He is a true poet whose poetry is a wonderful work of powerful feelings – of pains, agonies and hopes. In his poetry we can find a blend of lyrical and satirical element. He is very simple in his subject matter and treatment. The poet in a very beautiful way exhibits the emotional struggle of Indian city dwellers and villagers. This modern enigma we can see in his poem 'A Subway Railway Station', which is a superb piece of poetry, reveals the agony of a station master. Through the monologue of the stationmaster, he presents the sufferings of common man.

I feel like scarecrow in a locust-ravaged cornfield
With three daughters to marry, an asthmatic wife,
I'm too timid even to face the sun.

(Woolgathering, p. 35)

Kumar is a poet who is known for his portrayal of India and its different aspects in very a beautiful way. He is essentially concerned with the '**Indianness**' of his experiences in order to

recreate new themes, technique and idioms, distinct from writers all over the world who write in English. His poems on Indian subjects depict the natural scene and environment, Indian life and Indian myth and philosophy. His treatment of Indian themes is so genuine and obvious that it remain unaffected from the western attitude of the poet. His poetry epitomizes the multi-dimensional experience of being Indian- the inheritance of a glorious culture and civilization, the sufferings of the present and glimpses of aspiration and hopes for the future. In his specifically Indian poem, 'Indian Woman' we can see the Indian culture and tradition when he describes the patience of Indian women, waiting for their men's return:

Patiently they sit
Like empty pitchers
On the mouth of the village well...
Waiting for their men's return

(Cobwebs in the Sun, p.4)

In his another very Indian poem, 'Banaras: Winter Morning', he presents the religious picture of India through Banaras, the city which is the symbol of religion and holiness, with the beautiful image of one winter morning the city, he says:

Each tree by the roadside
Smearred with saffron and white ash-
Its roots seeking succor
From the holy waters.....

The poet, mesmerized by the city, admits:

If I were to die
This is the moment
And this is the place.

(Woolgathering, p.23)

In this poem, the poet's philosophical vision of the world with the reflection of Indian landscape reaches a great height.

But another picture of India is seen in a very different way in his poetry when we see the hidden reality of religion prevailing in India. Like any other Postcolonial poet, S.K. Kumar is against the mechanical performance of rituals. In one of his interviews he says that- "a simple person, who does his work all right, is to me a little God."² In his poem 'Kali', he depicts the su-

perstitutions that are prevalent in India. Animal sacrifices are made before Gods and Goddesses to satisfy the deity can be taken as a form of superstition present in India. He says ironically:

If the way to create
Is the way to kill
I have hoarded enough blood
In my throat
For all the hyenas to suck from.

(Subterfuges, p. 34)

As the most important element of Postcolonial literature is the sense of national identity, consciousness of the richness of the cultural heritage of motherland and its wealth of natural resources. Shiv K. Kumar like other Postcolonial Indian English poets believes in indigenous identity. In many of his poems we can see Kumar's seeking for the national and cultural identity. While living in alien land he became very closer to his motherland i.e. India. He discards the foreign land and refuses to fall among the traps of foreign culture. In his famous poem 'A Letter from New York', he brings out the difference in cultural outlook between a native and a foreign, he mocks and says:

The white of the negro maid's eyeballs
Is the only thing here.
Besides, of course, the quart gallon carton of milk
Squatting at my door.

(Subterfuges, p.18)

He affirms his indigenous belief and identity which dwells in his own soul and asserts his identity by refusing the foreign flavour by saying very true and beautiful lines about the real soul of India by saying:

They wouldn't believe it here
That Ganges water can work miracles:
In spite of the cartloads
Of dead men's ashes and bones –
Daily offerings to the river.

(Subterfuges, p.18)

These lines show Kumar's determination to be rooted in his soil.

Thus, after a brief look of Shiv K. Kumar's poems we can say that he is essentially a poet with marked poetic sensibility. The most important quality of his poetry is he takes up a simple incident or experience from the vast expanse of Indian and contemporary life and invests it with irony. His keen sense of observation and his imaginativeness make his poems both credible and interesting. Apart from applying new themes in his poetry, Kumar has contributed to the creation of new idioms (i.e. Indian English idioms) and that made him a successful Postcolonial Indian English poet. His poetry does not speak for any particular region or community, but it speaks for whole India, for whole world. Unlike other Indian poets writing in English who go on manufacturing verses with the only aim of increasing their quantitative output, Shiv K. Kumar writes only when he feels the impact of creative impulse so whatever he writes he does so carefully with the inborn instinct of creating it as perfect as possible. As for him Bijay Kumar Das rightly said,

“Kumar will always be a source of inspiration for Postcolonial Indian English poets in the new millennium for his daring portrayal of new themes in straight forward language.”³

Works Cited:

¹Quoted by Bijay Kumar Das, “Post-1960 Indian English Poetry and the Making of Indian English Idioms”. Indian English Literature since Independence, Ed. K. Ayyappa Panikar (New Delhi: The Indian Associations for English Studies, 1991). P. 115.

²Quoted by Devendra Kohli, Indian Writers at Work, Ed. Devendra Kohli (New Delhi : B.K. Publishing Corporation, 1991) p. 182.

³Bijay Kumar Das, Shiv K. Kumar : As a Postcolonial Poet (New Delhi:) Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001) p. 20.