

SYNTHESIS OF EASTERN AND WESTERN VIEWS IN SHIV K. KUMAR'S

'UNDER ALIEN SKIES' AND 'GENESIS'

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Abstract

*Shiv K. Kumar writes a number of poems on the West and sees it from the Indian point of view. In the section 'Under Alien Skies', the poet shifts scene from Heathrow Airport: Immigration Checkpost to Trafalgar Square and from The Holocaust Survivor at Auschwitz to Sunday Preacher on TV at New York. The poet has beautifully utilized the cultural interaction of the East and West for the formation of his themes. In the section 'Genesis', Kumar examines the origin of the creation of the world. Kumar authentically depicts the East-west relationship and makes a synthesis of Eastern and Western view of the creation of the world. Apart from employing new themes in his poetry, Kumar has contributed substantially to the creation of a new idiom. His themes are common and uncommon both. He is conscious about the outcome of cultural pluralism in India and abroad both.*

**Key Words-***Alien, preacher, Genesis, Holocaust, Adam, Eve, Satan*

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Shiv K. Kumar writes a number of poems on the West and sees it from the Indian view point. He is conscious about the outcome of cultural plurality in India and abroad both. The section 'Under Alien Skies' contains seven poems with locales in America and England. Here the poet writes on Trafalgar Square, Heathrow Airport, and the Holocaust Survivor and so on. Kumar's power of ironic observation is evident in 'A Young Female Jogger'

I've conspired with the Trees  
and lamp-posts along your track  
to turn on the cameras' fast shutters  
as you zip through the stratosphere. (*Trapfalls in the Sky* 55 )

Seeing the female jogger on the jogging track, the poet notices the movement- 'Thor in your eyes / flambeaux in your hair / gazelles in your feet' (55) and about the rhythm of various parts of body, is a sort of love play. He writes:

If hips, thighs and calves sway to  
some rhythm, it must be a sort of  
love-play that knows how to leap across  
a pot-hole in the side-walk, an arc of the skies  
and also swing in bed (55 )

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He wonders who awaits for her at the end of the track. Sensuality in these lines is quite apparent.

will he mate you steel upon flint  
or just go down on his knees  
for a spurt of nectar  
for your navel ? (55)

Kumar looks at things from a stranger's view point. In 'Trafalgar Square' he presents a telling expression 'remnants of a lost empire / shiver in this mild winter.' (56)

The protagonist in 'Heathrow Airport: Immigration Checkpost' has to face piercing questions

These barbed questionings  
only test the tropical wind's  
virginity to sough through the yellow  
zone of inquisition. (57 )

The poet makes comparison between the officials at the immigration checkpost and the pandas on the Ganga bank are an interesting one.

The white raven, perched on a high  
stool behind his magic book,  
can caw off the names  
of all your ancestors  
like the panda on the Ganges bank. (57 )

The poem 'The Holocaust Survivor' is written for Arnost Lusting, the well known Czechoslovakian novelist, who survived the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz.

All that happened long ago  
before the first man swallowed  
his primal shame. (58 )

Kumar observes the life in the West and thinks of his own country. The poem 'Reminiscence' ends with a tense note that past cannot be torn apart from present, both go side by side. He concludes

'Action speak louder than words.

Prayers for Peace and Love

Jay Soahem Jay Jagat ! (62 )

In 'Sunday Preacher on T V', Kumar comments :

His mica eyes phosphoresce,

his carnation throat coos,

twitters, warbles, breathes

into the microphone's fist (63 )

The Preacher swings across the rostrum and the impact of his preaching is manifested in the lines 'A tear drops from a young widow's eyes,/a boozers veins chill at the specters/of hell. '(63)

Kumar debunks a Professor in 'Shakespeare Seminar: Fall 1981' who wants to spend his week-end with a lady student and borrowing the images

from Othello,He writes 'Lie with her ! Lie on her!/Noses, ears and lips !' ( 64 )

The indiscriminate coupling at 'Shakespeare Seminar' at Oklahoma University, USA reduces it to a 'goatish week-end'.

Is this an epilogue to a goatish week-end?

So that's why Sheila never turns in her paper

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on time. But should I feel jaundiced  
if the cuckoo mates under a cornice  
in a grocery store, above the frozen meats –  
legs, thighs and breasts ? ( 64 -65 )

The section 'Genesis' consists of six poem's 'Birth of Adam', 'Birth of Eve', 'Serpent to Eve', 'Eve to Adam', 'Adam to Eve', and 'After the Departure of Adam and Eve from Eden'. He depicts authentically the East-West relationship and makes a synthesis of the Eastern and the Western view of the creation of the world. In the words of Surjit S. Dulai:

Elements of both Western and Indian origin, thus combine in Kumar's poetry to provide an ecumenical duality of distinctions between sacred and profane, sublime and mean, good and bad in strictly human terms. He applies these distinctions evenly across his experience, Indian or Western. The genesis of his sensibility and the scope of his subject matter alike make him a write of worldwide importance. (34)

The poem 'Birth of Adam' presents God's urge to create man and woman. And the Lord God formed a man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul' (69)

Kumar gives reason behind the creation in the following manner.

It was the urge to commune  
with a sentient being -  
not just cattle, fish and flora-

that I breathed into this lump of clay,  
moulded in my own likeness. (69)

Then God's monologue refers to the 'Birth of Eve'

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon  
Adam, and he slept: and he took one of the ribs,  
and closed up the flesh thereof. (7 1)

Adam in his sleep dreams of a woman to be called Eve 'of a strange creature -/a bosom with two moons,'(71)and the irony of the situation is that he never imagined '..... that this creature / of honey and vinegar' may lead him into 'disheritance'. (71)

Both Adam and Eve were created and they were living happily in Eden following God's injunction not to taste the forbidden fruit, then the serpent appears and entices Eve:

'Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the  
day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods,  
knowing good and evil' (72)

Satan in the form of the serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.'Take my word, O Woman,/taste this fruit and you will see' everything.

Venkatachari says, 'The serpents 'brief ecounter' with Eve is presented with just a hint of ironic stichomythia that lifts it from the literal to the literary, from the metonymies to the metaphoric' (95).

In 'Adam to Eve', Adam as human lover appeals her:

O bone of my bones, flesh of my  
Flesh, I feel I've found the rib I'd  
lost in my dream. (74)

Adam in passion having tasted forbidden fruit, praises Eve's beauty. Expressing his solidarity with her, Adam is ready to brave the punishment. 'And if to know is to die,/why not perish together ? '(75). Adam is ready to die for her sake and says- 'why not perish together?'

'Eve to Adam' describes the remaining action of the story. 'I see between/ your eyes a third one opening' (76)and replies in the same flurry of passion:

As you breathe into my nostrils  
a whale rises in my blood-  
stream, stirring up tidal waves. (76)

Eve reassures Adam of her love for him and does not regret the fall. She aptly refers the fall, and craves for the earlier stage of bliss. Now eternal bliss is gone, and the beast is crying for redemption.

You, who were called upon to name  
all cattle, bird and fish,  
what beast is now crying out within me  
for redemption ? (76)

Adam and Eve, for disobeying their God, are expelled from Eden, they move away hand in hand. 'After the Departure of Adam and Eve from Eden', the God is introspecting Himself. 'Since I banished them from my presence,/I've been soul-searching.'(77)God feels sad and lonely, and alludes to the fall of humanity and partly blames Himself. If He knew all this why He did not give the right counsel?

If I'd foreseen it all, shouldn't I  
have counseled them in their moment of  
choice ? But I should rather imagine that,  
for a while, I'd voluntarily blinkered

my omniscience. (77)

The serpent succeeded in this devious act. After the departure of Adam and Eve, the God feels forsaken. 'But now that they're gone, / I feel forsaken too.' (77) This poem as 'God's Monologue' is one of the remarkable sequence of poems entitled 'Genesis' which seeks to recreate the Biblical myth of the Fall of Man. It attempts not a dramatization of the Biblical story but a Miltonic discourse on the Great Betrayal of Faith and Trust by Adam and Eve engineered by the serpent's casuistry and perfidy' (Venkatachari 95). The two of the sections 'Under Alien Skies' and 'Genesis' are about the West.

Kumar's wide perspective on the world grows still wider — it acquires cosmic proportions in 'Genesis', the last section of Trapfalls. In this poem, the heritage of Biblical, Islamic, and Hindu mythologies and the literary legacies of Milton, Goethe, love poetry in Sanskrit, Persian and Urdu-Hafiz, Ghalib, and Iqbal - blend into one in Kumar's sensibility to create quintessential images of man and woman and what makes human life human. Although extraterrestrial beings- God and Satan - are there, their presence is but a backdrop to the central fact of human existence, its vast significances rippling towards infinity. (Dulai34)

However, M. K. Naik and Shyamla Narayan comments 'Genesis is the least rewarding part of the book, because in spite of sporadic irony, the poet has not been able to maintain a consistent point view throughout. He brings no freshness of approach to the age old theme either. Genesis remains a case of old bottle, old wine, old Table' (Naik and Narayan 20(11, 159).

Apart from employing new themes in his poetry, Kumar has contributed substantially to the creation of a new idiom. Bijay Kumar Das remarks-

Consider him as a great poet for reasons that are perfectly clear. He has courage of conviction, variety in themes, insight into the sufferings in life and above all, command of the language. He has adopted the post-colonial condition into the texture of his poetry (105).

Thus, Shiv K. Kumar is a unique voice of post-colonial Indian English poetry. His themes are common and uncommon both. His early poetry is autobiographical and confessional in irony and gentle humour are the tools which employs in uplifting his poetic style. Kumar authentically depicts the East-West relationship and sees it from the Indian point of view. His poetry is the poetry of cultural interaction and cultural plurality.

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