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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 11: Shiv K. Kumar

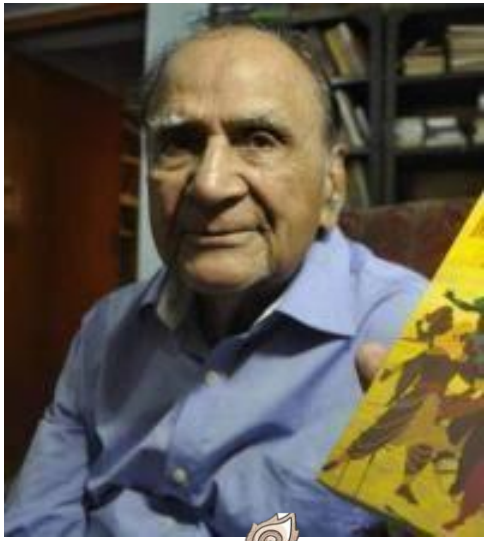
BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Introduction

- Born in Lahore in 1921.
- Strict discipline of Arya Samaj, Orthodox Hindu Family.
- A doctorate from Cambridge on *Bergson and the Stream Consciousness Novel.*
- Satiric Rationalist , and a Postcolonial Imagist poet
- Sahitya Akademi Award (1987), Padma Bhushan (2001)
- Indian English poet, playwright, novelist, and short story writer.
- *Bergson and the Stream Consciousness Novel* (1962)
- He breathed his last in 2017.





Poetry Collections

- *Articulate Silences* (1970)
- *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974)
- *Subterfuges* (1975)
- *Woodpeckers (* 1979)
- *Broken Columns* (1984)
- *Trapfalls in the Sky* (1986)
  (Sahitya Akademi Award- 1987)
- *Wool Gathering* (1995)
- *Thus Spake the Budhha* (2001)

"In tone and structure my poetry may be autobiographical but the readers fail to comprehend that a poet often invents facts an experiences, camouflaging them as real and authentic , to achieve the readers' total participation." (Shiv K. Kumar)

Characteristics of Poems

- Confessional Mode
- Evocative images
- Tortures of a modern world
- Distorted human reality
- Humorous and savage
- The sufferings of the layman
- Wit, Irony and sophistication
- Satiric of sexual representation in India
- Domestic crisis: break-up of marriages, relationships etc.

“Married too Long”

One by one
The stars have faded
From your face

Now you loom large
between doors-
A dropping grey sky

For me to walk through.
We wear each other
like soiled underwear.

I see you hang
On every wall
Like an obituary

Contd…

Of our first spring
When doves mated
Under flurried wings

On every window –sill.
Now let me entomb you
In a glide frame,

Stand you on the mantlepiece
Below my grandfather's cuckoo-
Clock to hoot down hourly

Our routine loves
Till death do not us apart.

(*Cobwebs in the Sun* ,1974)

Analysis of the Poem

- Life and love
- Failure of love and marriage
- Mundane Relationship
- Stark and urban
- Romance is dead and rotten
- Ugly human experience
- Lyrical and satirical element

"Kumar sees woman not as an object of beauty but sees the ugliness, dirt, and disease associated with life. It is a negative vision running counter to the romantic glorification of woman."- Das

“At a Psychedelic Art Exhibition”

The Center expands to devour
the ambit.

The cat’s retina cannot
hold the fish bowl for the fins
amber crimson hectic red
are balls of fire
dancing around a vacuity.

The motile pattern of the
Damascus carpet steps out of its
Bounds to flow over
into the bare flow.

Contd…

The sunset broods over the insidious
by-lanes of San Francisco:
the men in the pavement pubs
drinking from Leviathan tankards
will soon roll down the slopes.

On the front wall
The Buddha's eyes
shaken out of potty quietude
blink hysterically
under the throbbing neon lights

Contd…

and the percussive music
that lead us down the dark
hollows of the snake-pit.

Let us walk through this canvas
to the room's end
Where the crocodiles
are meditating.

Interpretation of the Poem, “At a Psychedelic Art Exhibition”

- Impressionistic pictures of an art exhibition.
- Tapestry of Images
- Ideas and abstractions
- Lyrical and satirical element
- Poetry for him, ‘is a spontaneous discoveries of the imagination about one or another aspect of reality.’
- A picture of fragmentation, squalor, crassness, stress of modern life especially in the west.



“Insomnia”

My wife snores. My son's dream
fingers have reached the sideboard's
top-shelf for Cadbury.
The sky grins through a handful
of stars while I hold the defiant
pills in my torpid hand.

I'm a double agent. I'll drug
my watch dog to burgle my own house.

Contd…

I know where my wife's secrets
lie sealed. Each night I hear
the same tattoo in my skull's chamber.

I have counted all the stars
over my terrace. The steel bars in my
neighbor's balcony are twenty-one
and three suburban freight trains rumble past
the rail-crossing, between two and four.

Contd…

Darkness now snaps at the seams
A hymn floats across the sky
like a bird's warble.

And somewhere down the lane a hand-pump
creaks-the milkman's bottle
jingles at my doorstep.

I must walk through the day's fire
to let another moon demolish me.

Critiquing the Poem, “Insomnia”

- Discusses sleeplessness
- Depicts Modern man’s restlessness
- Echoes from Eliot’s *The Waste Land*
- Portrays the ‘gnawing consciousness of the soul’s disquietude’- Das

“Kumar’s poetry seems to be immediate, as if written at nerve end, and in the heat of or with still vivid memories of conflict.”

– (King, p.122)

Broken Columns

- A sequence of twelve poems
- Autobiographical
- Struggle for existence
- Particularities of Indian Hindu life

"Kumar's poems, for all their wit and humour, are angry, satiric responses to an India of passivity, sexual repression, political hypocrisy and over-glorified, crumpling past."

(Bruce king)

At ten I play hide and seek
down the school-lane in a shop
Stacked with teak and deodar
And suddenly Sheila's chequered
Skirt blows into life…
I transfix her behind a pillar
Of deodar and my lips
Release the tongue to plumb
The Bay of Bengal
Is there a point at which even the
parallel lines meet
Out of sheer exhaustion?

“An Indian Mango Vendor”

She squats
on the dust-broomed pavement
Behind a pyramid of mangoes
Washed with her youth’s milk
Tinctured with the musk-rose in her hair.
Through the slits
Of her patched blouse
One bare shoulder
Two bright moons
Pull all horses
Off the track.

From *Woolgathering*

- Futility of dreams and fantasies
- Submission and surrender alone are not approved of
- Union of two souls matters much
- Love is a centripetal force and requires attachment
- A woman's feelings are equally important as a man's.

But before you shatter this vase, won't you
Join in my prayer for awhile? I'd then swallow
Your words, for ritual's sake
It will be easier for me to jump
Onto the flaming pyre.

("First Night After a Dowried Wedding")

Kumar's regards for Women

Look at this woman you created
out of me. A marvel, isn't she? A symphony
of design and aroma. A rose-bush grown out of
my rib's seedling. Temptation even for your
angels to deny you, at least for a night.
Was it a sin if I pressed her to my bosom?
May be I was just reclaiming my lost rib. (*Losing My Way,* 6)

Conclusion

- Kumar is a modernist who blends confessional mode and ironic comments in his poems.
- His poetic world, though full of common subjects, comprises contraries, antagonism and paradoxes with touches of intellectual reasoning.
- His poetry aims to celebrate life by coming out of superstitious beliefs and failures which deny mankind the joy and satisfaction because of ‘human inadequacies’.
- Kumar is of the view that human spirit must strive against mundane boundaries.

Beyond the priest's monotone
A lamb bleats for the knife-edge.
A child clinging to famished
Nipples will die anyway
But your nectar is the blood
That jests from fresh arteries . ("Subterfuge", 34)

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