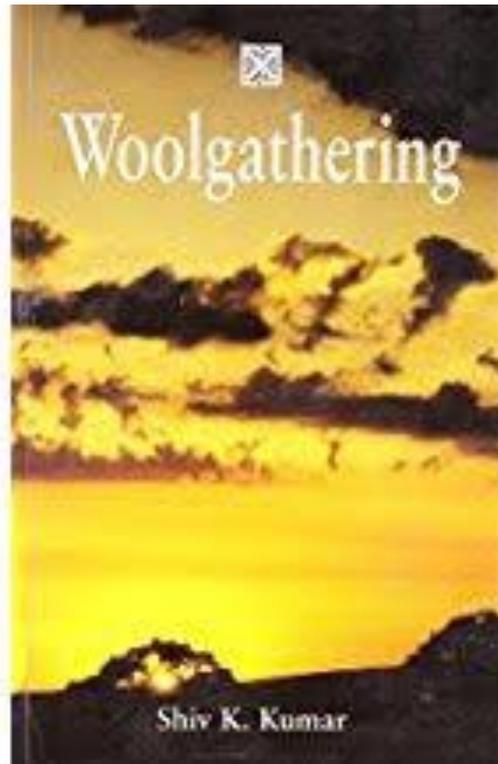


Treatment of the Celestial Objects in the Select Poems of Shiv K. Kumar

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Abstract

Shiv K. Kumar is a well-known poet and novelist of Indian English Literature. He writes poems on various themes like, Nature, Love, Sex, Social consciousness, Death etc., He is known for his extraordinary use of images and symbols. He is interested to write poems on the celestial objects like the Sun, the Moon, Stars and other heavenly objects. This article focuses on some of the best celestial poems of Kumar. It explores Kumar as a great admirer of Nature which is obviously seen through his description of the celestial objects.

Key Words: Shiv K. Kumar, Celestial objects, the Sun, the Moon, Space, Stars, the Earth, Nature

Shiv K. Kumar

Shiv K. Kumar is prominently known as a poet and novelist who, besides poetry and novels, writes short stories, a drama, many critical essays and translations. Being inspired by various writers like T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, Sylvia Plath, Joseph Conrad and Faiz, his poetry and novels always bear the influence of these writers in spite of his originality. Being an ardent follower of the Imagist Movement, he writes poetry in free verse which allows the writer to express the feelings and emotions in an unrestricted way. Above all his verses are known for its epigrammatic

style. Being a recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award and Padma Bhushan Award, he occupies a unique place in Indian English Literature.

Poems on Celestial Bodies

Poems on the celestial bodies like the Sun, the Moon and the Stars are not a new one in English Literature. Many writers like Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Walt Whitman, and Robert Frost write many space poems. The poems like, “The Moon” by R. L. Stevenson, “Night” by William Blake, “The Early Morning” by Hilaire Belloc, “Stars” by Bronte Sisters, “The Moon” by Emily Dickinson, and “To the Moon” by Shelley are some of the well-known space poems. Shiv K. Kumar, an adorer of nature spends most of his time and ink to admire nature. Among many components of Milky Way, the moon, “the most beautiful lady of the universe”, attracts Kumar a lot. Many of his poems talk of moon in different perspectives. A poet is a man who practices himself to envision and see every natural object, every time, in a similar way. His perspectives must be different even though the objects are the same.

Select Poems of Shiv K. Kumar

The poem, “Moongazing” looks like a nature poem, but it is a satirical poem of Shiv K. Kumar. He is an eco-conscious person who hesitates to accept the scientific advancements and technological developments. The poem, “The Computer” is the best instance for his hatred towards the science and technology. In the poem, he addresses computer as a “Delphic box” which very often confuses the user. According to him it is not user-friendly. He says, “I cannot commune with this Delphic box.” (1) He is not pleased with the developments taking place in this modern world. He does not want the eco system to be disturbed by the scientific advancements. The poem “Moongazing” censures the attempt of man to step in to the moon, one of the important celestial bodies of the cosmos. Generally, moon easily attracts the attention of the writers. Moon is addressed by the great romantic poet Shelley in his “To the Moon” as pale faced who becomes tired of climbing to the heaven. The American writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne adores the beauty of the moon by calling it as silver moon. Kumar in this poem approaches moon in a different way. He says, “The face in the silver mirror/no longer smiles.” (1-2) Here, silver mirror refers to the moon and he believes there is someone’s face reflects in the silver mirror moon.



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Kumar feels that, in those days man spies the movement of the enemies around his castle or nation alone but now his vision becomes wide and his sight falls on the major celestial body, the

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moon. He does not want man to do research in other planets to find out any possibility for living. He avers the beauty and smile of the moon is declined once the masked man enters into the space of the moon. He calls the space suit as masks and the astronauts as intruders: “But now the masked man/ intruders zoom in, like ravens” (5-6). Generally, Raven is considered as an ill-omen bird. The famous structuralist, Claude Levi Strauss mentions raven as a bird which is associated with death and ghost. Hence, by comparing the astronauts to the ravens, he expresses his hatred towards the people who step in to the moon for research.

Through the research of the astronauts, it is clearly exposed that there is no possibility for living in the moon. Moon is filled with dust, and it does not have any essential things for the survival of man. On knowing the condition of moon, the researchers lack their spirit and the research ends in failure. But it is always the nature of man to accept the failure, and here the great scientists are not an exception. They take a small rock from the moon to prove their visit in the moon. The poet compares the rock to the most precious Kohinoor diamond and mocks the activity of the astronauts: “. . . But not/ without carrying away a baby-rock, / as if it were the Kohinoor” (15-17).

Earth

According to the author, the Earth is the place allotted by the God to live. It is the place for men, animals, plants, and thousands of creatures created by God. He questions why man is eager in search of another place to live since he possesses the most beautiful planet, the Earth. Instead of protecting the planet in his hands, he spends money to know about the sources available in another planet. He does not want the nature to be disturbed by man. He wants to leave it and keep it as it is.

Celestial Bodies

Another beautiful poem about one of the celestial bodies by Kumar is “Counting the Stars.” It describes, how the stars play hide and seek game with the poet who counts the stars. Generally, it is impossible to count the stars that present in the sky. But the poet starts the poem with a positive note. He thinks it is possible to count the starts: “I thought it could be done” (1). To get succeed in the counting process, he wishes to separate the stars into small groups and count. He chooses a small cluster of stars which is there just above the steeple of Shiva temple. When the poet is about to finish his counting process, the stars start to play with him. Kumar is known for his sexual images. This poem is also not an exception. He says that the star enters into the body of another star to enjoy the sexual pleasure. He says:

But I had hardly gone midway
when they started playing hide and seek –
they even entered each other’s bodies
to savour consummation (4-7)

Connecting Normal Acts to Other Types

It is the quality of the poet to connect a normal action with his thoughts. Here, the appearance and disappearance of the stars are a normal action. But the poet connects it to the sexual discourse, a hyperbolic statement. Though it is a hyperbolic statement, it beautifies the poem. Kumar is addressed by the critics as a metaphysical writer who is known for his different and unfamiliar metaphors. The movement of the stars is compared by the poet to the movement of the pawns in the chess board. He also says that the stars change itself in a fraction of seconds. A single star becomes double in a minute and plays with the poet by confusing him. Finally, the hope of the poet goes away, and he gives up the attempt of counting stars: “Each star seemed to change its stance/ from monism to dualism. / I threw up my hands in despair” (9-11).

Finally, the poet ends the poem with a wish. He wants the stars to be a constant body like the Sun and the Moon. He does not want the ever-changing attitude of the stars which acts as a barrier to count it. If it is constant like the Sun and the Moon, it can be easily counted easily. With this impossible wish, he puts an end to the poem, "Counting the Stars." This poem reminds the poem by Amiri Baraka's "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note" which too has a reference about the counting of stars.

Contrast Between the Life in Space and the Earth

Another interesting poem which contrasts the life in space to the life in the Earth is "Space Up There." All the poems of Kumar do justice to the title, in that way. The poem, "Space Up There" expresses the peaceful life of space which is totally contrast to the earthly life. One can find the longing of Kumar to go and settle in the space instead of tolerating the disgusting, moral less society of the Earth. The poem is an imagination of the poet who thinks of his life in space which ultimately reduces his pressures and gives pleasure. One can find contradictory statements prevail in the poems of Shiv K. Kumar. In the Poem, "Moongazing," he does not want man to go to other planets and disturb the space, but in the poem, "Space Up There" he wants to go to space and wishes to lead a peaceful life there. This contradiction can be justified by the statement of Roland Barthes in his work "Death of the Author." who says that the writer must not be aware of what he is writing. In that way Kumar, a true poet is unaware of his contradictory ideas expressed in two different poems.

One night, the poet envisions himself climbing through the ladder to the sky. He wishes to escape from the venomous place, the Earth which is filled with cunning people whose words and actions hurt others like the stinging bees. The comparison of the six sensed selfish inhabitants of the Earth to the stinging bees is an appropriate one. He wants to escape from the ill-natured people of the Earth, and hence he wants a place in the space.

The poet becomes tired both physically and mentally. He imagines going to the sky and lying down on the cloud -bed which is so feathery and soft giving a soothing effect to his exhausted body and soul. He is sure that he never gets any peace of mind in the Earth. Unlike the Earth, the space gives comfort to him. Kumar wishes to sleep in the cloud- bed and dreams of various things: "I Propose to stretch my jaded body there/ on the thistledown bed of a cloud/ and dream away" (6-8). The last three lines explore the ill nature of the people in the Earth. He mentions the place Earth as a place of fights and jealousy. One can compare the world portrayed by Kumar to the land of Kurushetra. He says: "Down there, there is too much of wrangling/ and heartburning. It's not a place/ for lovers and dreamers." (9-11) The poem, "Space Up There" is a perfect satire on the worldly life and the people of the Earth. The poet wants a peaceful life which he does not get in the Earth. But the space is a suitable place to dream and think which the major sources for the writers and artists.

Sunrise

The poem, "Sunrise" is a poem about dawn and dusk at surface level, but a deep analysis gives a deep meaning in which the poet preaches the readers to get rid of the mental fear about death. This short poem consists of two stanzas with five lines each. The first stanza sketches the beauty of the Sun rise and its magnificence. It is a known fact that because of the movement of the Earth, the Sun seems to rise from the East direction, but the people always perceive that the Sun rises in the East and sets in the West. The poet, like a normal human being, says that the Sun rises from the underworld in orange colour, and slowly it changes its orange shade to white rays. He says: "As the orange glow surfaces from the underworld/ and gradually deepens into white haze" (1-2).

The magnificence of the Sun is clearly explored by the poet as when the rays of the Sun falls on the Earth, no object is bold enough to stand before it and hence they shed off its pride self. When the Sun passes its flaring rays, the clouds scatters, the strong-headed Ashoka tree and Coconut tree shed off their prideful nature and become passive: “Every object is stripped- / clouds, like skeletons of greyhounds, / conceited Ashoka trees or self-righteous coconuts” (3-5).

The last five lines of the poem are the best example to teach the readers about how to approach life and death. No writer can surpass Kumar in motivating his readers to lead the life in a positive way. With the great splendour, the Sun rises in the morning, but the same Sun engulf itself in the same underworld in the evening. This is a lesson to every man of the world. Through its death and rebirth, the Sun becomes a great role model for human society. Man has to approach death in a easy way just like the Sun. A matured mind accepts the fact that death is common, and there is always a possibility for rebirth. Hence, death leads to a new life. It accepts readily that birth, death, and rebirth are common in a man’s life:

But it’s such beginnings that befuddle my mind-
first a promise of grace and beauty
then the decent into the grave.
But how can you confront the sun
if you don’t seek rebirth after each death? (6-10)

The above lines can be approached in a different way too. It gives motivation to man to struggle till he wins in the life. Success and defeat are quite common in the life of man, and hence, he must not be muffled by the defeats he faces in his life. If there is death, rebirth is always there to show a new path to live. Like the Sun, everyone of this world must struggle to rise in the life. By portraying Sun in a positive way, he proves the words of William Wordsworth that Nature is a teacher.

Celebration of Images

Kumar’s poems are celebrated for its images. Being a follower of the Imagist Movement, Imagery plays a prominent role in his poems. His poem, “Images” is the best instance to prove his passion for images. The poem, “Dawnbreak over Khasi Hills” paints the act of sun rise aesthetically with apt images. He says that before the dawn disappears, the Sun appears and peeps its head: “Here the Sun rears its head/ even before the dawn bares its ochre fangs” (1-2). Here, the “ochre fangs” is a visual imagery used to denote the shape yellowish orange rays of dawn.

Kumar’s poetic quality and uniqueness is revealed through his comparison of the singing of the bird, sparrow to the requiem. Here, the dirge song is an auditory image which appeals to the ears. The imagination of the poet is unparalleled when he compares the sweet song of the sparrows to the dirge song for the death of night. The birth of the Sun naturally expresses the end of the night. End here refers to the death of the night. It is usual for a bird to sing song in the morning, but the poet says that the sparrows are not just singing, but it mourns for the death of the night through its melancholic singing.

To Conclude

Through the poems mentioned above, the poetic quality of the poet is clearly seen, and it helps the readers to understand how Kumar treats the heavenly objects in his poems in an impressive way. Each poem is unique in its way talking about the celestial objects like the Stars, Moon, and Sun. Each celestial object has its own quality and its own inimitability. They are totally different from

each other; likewise, his way of treating the celestial objects is also different. Thus, by approaching different things differently, his perception is also different among the galaxy of poets in the Indian English Literature.

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