



INNOVATIVE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN; THE POETRY OF SHIV K KUMAR AND KAMALA DAS

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Modern Indian English poetry is remarkable for its contribution to world literature for exploration and invention of new themes and style of existence of it as well. Modern Indian English poets like Shiv K Kumar and Kamala Das, and many more have invented new themes inspired by their own life and set their own parameter in the depiction of these themes. One of the favourite themes of the discussed writers is portrayal of inner dilemma and external beauty of the Indian Women; keeping away all the limitations of society, their daring effort had brought images of Indian women on the canvas of World Literature, but this is appreciable that there is only beauty, agony, patience, courage and faithfulness of women without any essence of vulgarity.

The two names always taken for their revolutionary attitude and honest description are Shiv K Kumar and Kamala Das; always celebrated for their daring and bold depiction of Indian Women, they tried to break the conventional mind-set of Indian people who think of Indian women to be shy, feared and only a piece of enjoyment and beauty. Kumar and Das both were awarded by the Central Sahitya Akademy award for their contribution in Indian English Literature. The main themes discussed in their poetry are Indianness, landscape, love and sex, and self-search; they have paid their vital contribution to all themes discussed above, but their attitude and straightforwardness in the depiction of women has made them a rebellion and bold poet.

Born in Lahore in 1921 and faced crisis of partition, Shiv K Kumar is one of the most significant voices of Indian English poetry. He is seen as one of the most innovative and inspiring influences of Indian English poetry and recognized for his innovative attitude and



sensibility, as Daruwalla rightly called him in *The Hindu*," the high priest of modernism." Since he lived life of two different cultures, west as well as of the east, he shares his experience in his most famous poem "Indian Women" which presents an ideal image of Indian women whose partners have gone away in the border.

In this triple-baked continent
women don't each angry eyebrows
on mud walls
Patiently they sit
like empty pitchers
on the mouth of village well.

The poem speaks about the endless patience the Indian women practice in their lives; they are waiting for their men on "the triple baked continent" of sun "on the mud walls" of "village well" still they are happy and not raising their "eyebrows". The inventive imagery Kumar uses in his poems makes vivid to his description for example he says Indian women are searching hope in their "mississippi's long hair", looking in the "water's mirror."

On the bold portrayal of women and sex he speaks and clears his view, "I've always said that in our country we have Lord Venkateshwara's temple and we also have Khajuraho. Our *Puranas* and *Shastras* are important, so is *KamaSutra*, which we have always recommended. When I introduce a woman in my writings, it is to show that sex need not to be treated as something unclean; it is a very valid segment of human experience."

The traditional picture of women created by Kumar in this poem is renewed in his next poem "To a Prostitute" where he compares a prostitute with a deity performing the act of "congregation" and he wishes to "wash my hands at the same font" further he says, "where others have dropped their fingers/and walked away". Without any fear and hesitation Kumar daringly chooses subjects related to the negative aspects of Indian women and shares their sufferings very decently. The poems "At the Whorehouse", "The Cabaret Dancer", "Trapeze Dancers," "Rape" are the finest example of his exploration of such themes.



Another revolution of Kumar in Indian English poetry is his portrayal of Indian women's external beauty by using variety of imagery, as in the poem "An Indian Mango Vendor" charm and beauty of a mango vendor's is depicted as "washed with her youth's milk", "one bare shoulder", "two white moons", "mango-nipples" and in the poem "Birth of Eve", to depict Eve as a highly sensuous figure, he writes, her "two shoulders" are like "mute doves", "lips" like "two petals peeled off a gold cup" and "eyes", "spellbind a pansy". (Trapfalls in the Sky p.71) In another poem 'Lolita' poet describes beauty of a teenage girl "her silken tresses", "like a Jaipur doll's" is arousing a desire to get delighted by "creating whirlpools". Shiv K. Kumar redefines idea and awareness to use a new language while depicting Indian women that is "the language of body" and employs it for "a full exposure of body and mind," he widely employs this technique of expressing the woman's beauty in a number of poems and take an attempt to think it as an essential part of life.

Kamala Das known as the most revolutionary poet of the age owns three volumes of celebrated poems *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendant* (1967) and *The Old Playhouse and Other poems* (1973). Her early poetry is a revelation of her inner pain and grief, but later she became a voice of all modern Indian women's concerns and sufferings. Her autobiography, *My Story* which is translated into fourteen international languages, celebrated worldwide readership and marked as one of the bold story ever written. One can find a glimpse of her boldness and honesty of depiction in one of her earlier poems "An Introduction" where she refuses to follow all the duties of a traditional wife in a conventional society and says;

...Dress in Sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook
Be a quarreller with servants.

She followed an unconventional way and exposes all the secrets of women which are not supposed to be disclosed in Indian society. She puts a question mark on the performance of marriages in Indian society, when she is forced to spend her whole life with an unfamiliar person and says,

When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask
For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the



Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me

But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me.

I shrank pitifully.

(An Introduction)

Her poem "An Introduction" is a noticeable piece for her urge and aspiration that makes her a voice of every exploited female. Like Kumar, she has a long list of bold anatomical images such as "sorry breasts", "menstrual blood", "burnished brass", "maggot nip", "dribble spittle", "your bitter-sweet juices", "my poor lust" etc. As she uses "stand nude", "his limbs", "he urinates", "dropping towel" and writes in "The Looking Glass":

Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of

Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts,

The warm shock of menstrual blood, and all your

Endless female hunger.

Here we didn't find any effort by both writers discussed above to idealize the image of Indian women they both have represented the real picture by adopting a new attitude and phenomena. They have hardly taken any attempt to hide or recreate the scene, all is depicted in its natural form and this is the individuality of Kumar and Das. Both are often labelled as "rebellion" and "confessional" poets by critic, but there is nothing to prove from their side.

To sum up, Shiv K. Kumar and Kamala Das both highlight the beauty and pathetic condition of Indian women by adopting an inventive mood and different style developed by them, through their poetry they favour the fact that women are source of power, love and honour in the society and we can see a concern in their poems for the place of women. They both have paid their love and tribute to their mother and grandmother in the poems as Kumar has many poems dedicated to his mother ie "An Encounter with Death" and Das in "My Grandmother's House" but at the same time they dare to speak about the lover of their mother or grandmother. To quote Devendra Kohli "Her poetry is in final analysis an acknowledgement and a celebration of the beauty and courage of being a woman. Kamala Das is essentially a poet of the modern Indian woman's ambivalence, giving expression to it



more nakedly than any other Indian women poet". Thus, this is a new trend of poetry developed by them where reality finds its exact place without any imagination or idealism.

References:

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