



Death : A Leveler, an Emotional Turbulence and the Rituals

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Abstract:

The theme of death is one of the most discussed themes in pieces of poetry and prose. It can be associated with the theme of life or be presented with the help of its depiction through the analysis of the human values. Commonly, poets tend to present a negative attitude of death in their works due to death's associations with misery and grievance.

The present research paper deals with death as a theme in the selected poems of Shiv K Kumar. It is a notable fact, rather an irony of fate, that Kumar began his poetic career with a poem on death titled "An Encounter with Death", which was written by him on the death of his mother. He does not idolize death, he is not fascinated by it nor does he find it as an escape. For him, death is the end. It is painful, simple, real and unnerving.

Key words : Death consciousness, rituals, emotional turbulence .

Death, Love, Pain, Unresolved Emotions among others are the primary concerns in the poems of Shiv Krishna Kumar popularly known as Shiv K Kumar.

He does not idolize death, he is not fascinated by it nor does he find it as an escape. He does not find an identity in it, does not personify it and he does not connect it to God either. For him, death is the end. It is painful, simple, real and unnerving.

1. Death, a Leveler

Death, in the works of Shiv K Kumar, is dealt as a simple and obvious end to the beginning of 'Life' and not as an emotional or spiritual event. Death is described as a leveler for all the classes of human beings and for all life categorizing humans sharing the same platform with all other living beings, together. We as humans do not want to accept that death brings us equal to all the living creatures on earth. The futility of life is understood in a different perspective with this.

His poem '*Suicide*' begins with the description of futility of life. 'The Python's sinewy grip...' represents the futility of humans in a life created by themselves. The use of the word 'pillar' creates a sense of dried up emotions and that of a static life which is too tough to change. It can break, but it will remain stagnant so long as it exists, static common and unwanted and 'beyond redemption'.

The poem '*Crematorium in Adikmet, Hyderabad*' also talks about death as the final futility. The line 'Here the earth replenishes itself-' and the last stanza describes the emotions in the head of the child who has lost its father but realizes that this very land will be brightened with the pyre of another human being, with the family having the same static feelings of futility of life. Human emotions, so dearly held all throughout the life reduces to nothing but 'the louder priest chants' for a generous tip. Kumar, a rationalist could not share the blind beliefs of the masses and instead writes such sarcastic poems on these rituals.

Similarly, in the poem '*At the Ghats of Banaras*', the pain of death turns pointless when a child's lissome body, ashes of young courtesan and a pet dog, all go into the same oblivion of death. "*At the Ghats of Banaras*" is a short poem of 20 lines divided in 4 stanzas. The last rites of the priest are a common motif in Shiv K Kumar's poetry signifying the uselessness of the significance humans' claim as humans. In the end, death levels all.

2. Death, as an emotional turbulence

Death as described in Shiv K Kumar's works serve as an end to life. It has been considered both as a third person perspective as well as emotional turbulence that it is. Several of the lines in his poems present mixed emotions considering death as an incessant and normal part of life, so obvious that it should not have any emotions connected to it and also as an emotional turbulence .

This is done by citing the act of dying, or the place or method of dying in a very casual manner.

In '*Suicide*', the lines 'The Python's sinewy... to ...prank on desperation' describe the emotional immobility that the poet is in. The first line of the fourth paragraph describes the mental condition of the poet and then connects it to the physical situation that he is in due to this. He is in his pool of blood, because he could not do anything and he can now do nothing after his jump from 'Eiffel Tower's muzzy heights' He has more ways to kill himself, but his hope of anything better is already over now.

He is so outcast from life that talking about death and suicide becomes ordinary for him.

This very idea of death is dealt with differently in the poem '*Crematorium in Adikmet, Hyderabad*'. In this poem, the emotional inactiveness described in '*Suicide*' is not as evident. The poem starts with very ordinary daily life situation:

'Incessant din of beggars
and chants.
A Skull rolls out of the drainhole.'

Sarcasm is used in the second paragraph, to describe how the body, which is food for vulture, is fed to pyre. The irony in 'No leavings for the living' does not reflect the emotional state that the family of the dead father might be in.

This can be connected to the second line in the first stanza, where ‘finding a skull’ and the ‘din of beggars’ are used in the same line.

The third stanza talks about everyday situation in the crematorium, consisting of the elements of the last rites of the bodies in Hindu tradition.

The only line in this poem where the emotions are openly described is in the form of irony in the last stanza, where the narrator describes the importance of his father’s death to the priests only because they expect to get more tips if they chant louder.

In the poem, ‘At the Ghats of Banaras’, Ganga is seen by the narrator as having a ‘carrion teeth’. Ganga, at Banaras can hold three or even more kinds of dead in its carrion teeth.

Here, a child’s body in a jute bag, a young courtesan’s body and even a man’s pet dog’s body find their place in the holy Ganges.

The priest chants for all, in the similar way just as the bodies submit themselves to the Ganga, with no emotions.

Evidently this is fine for the crocodiles as they dip into the ‘sacrosanct’ waters turning over the bodies as nothing more than a part of the food chain, with its belly mirroring the faces of death.

The ordinariness of the death and yet the cruelty of the same ordinariness are both evident in the last few lines of the poems.

3. Death as Rituals

The motif of rituals in the form of the chants of priests has been used in the poems ‘*Crematorium in Adikmet, Hyderabad*’ and ‘*At the Ghats of Banaras*’ with a type of irony. These rituals give us hints of emotionlessness and futility of human death.

In '*Crematorium in Adikmet, Hyderabad*', in the last line, the priest chants louder, in expectation of more tip because the matter of death of someone is a chance for material gain for him. The priests expect the relatives to pay more tips even as someone's 'skull crackles into a bonfire'.

The third paragraph of this poem concerns itself with the rituals and materials required in the rituals of the dead. The lines 'In the courtyard ... cinnamon, camphor and butter' are described just as some living being's morning routine. The death of someone has become trivialized under the impression of these words. The death has become weak and less emotional. Thus, death is disrobed of its emotions. It has become regular. It is presented as a common place event.

'At the Ghats of Banaras' too, chanting priests are quite common. There seems to be no difference between the deaths of a 'child's lissome body', ashes of a young courtesan and a man's pet dog. The chants of priests who do not distinguish between the three, thus creating a triviality of another kind.

One can say that his poems are born out of all experiences in life. Life is presented not as it should have been but as it is actually. There is an attempt on Kumar's part to come to terms with life and reality. And hence, pain and suffering become an ingredient of his poetry.

Works Cited

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