



CONFLICT AND CLASH OF PARTITION IN KUMAR VIKAL'S POETRY 'CAN YOU MAKE OUT'

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ABSTRACT

India has a highly complex and colorful social mosaic. Kumar Vikal's poetry is a record of intense inner struggle, expressed in the idiom of radical social change, ends its journey at a cool interface with death. Vikal makes his poetry special. It presents to us the story of the desire to stretch out of the lower middle class limitations to a broader social vision. In this process many Third World realities find their way into his poems. He also introduces a poetic style which can only be of the language of the oppressed. Kumar Vikal was a poet, who had been widely accepted as a major voice of his generation. It should be said that Vikal's poetry enriches this particular poetic space. It provides it with a different language, a different idiom. This idiom is concrete, earthy and local and for all reasons, Kumar Vikal can be called a son of the soil. Indian Poetry in the regional languages, especially Hindi Poetry, responded sharply to such acts of insanity. Kumar Vikal's poems were basically attempts at showing compassion with the emotionally ravaged existence of people who experienced partition.

Keywords: Social change, social vision, struggle, discrimination, conflict.

INTRODUCTION

In India social cultural mosaic is the true picture of "unity in diversity," like a bouquet of flowers or vegetables in a salad bowl, where every component while retaining its specific identity is a part of a larger whole. Upon this cultural diversity, within the ambit of civilization unity, is based the reality of the multi- ethnic society of India. Several cultural markers language, race, tribe, caste, religion and region serve as identity axes for ethnic groups and their mobilization. In most of the ethnic groups more than one of these cultural markers in pertinent for identification. In other words, India ethno communities have multilayered and multidimensional identities that impinge on each other in a non stratified and dynamic manner. The identity composition of ethno communities has been further complicated by the imposition of class distinctions not only between one and another ethno

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community, but also within each Multi layered non stratified identity composition has enabled ethnic groups to assert and reshuffle their cultural makers to advance their perceived objectives.

Kumar Vikal (1935-1997) was the prominent Hindi poet. He was a first-hand witness to the Partition as an adolescent, as well as to several wars and many mutiny. His work was immensely popularity in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. He was born in Wazirabad (in present-day Pakistan), he lived, worked and died in Chandigarh.

Poetry, in many ways, defies definition. Any restrictions would disqualify some works that are nevertheless, poetry. The only statement about poetry that we can make with absolute certainty is that good poetry uses what is known as “compressed language.” That means that it says a lot but uses few words to do so. Every word is very valuable the poets make their choices only after much deliberation, and we must understand each word to grasp the meanings of the poems. Poetry is often associated not only with specialized language but with a very dense use of such specialized language. Poems usually try to express their meaning in much less space than, say, a novel or even a short story.

There is a predisposition among modern poets to deliberately flaunt reader expectations about poetic language, it therefore follows that a poet is someone capable of conceiving a particular idea and expressing it in such a form as to achieve a particular effect. Often the persona in poetry is assumed to be that of the poet recounting an experience or series of thoughts about an experience in narrative or meditative form. That this became the main mode in the twentieth century is probably because personal accounts have and well continue to have a particular appeal.

India has a highly complex and colorful social mosaic. Yet, although characterized by a vast spread of cultural diversity and heterogeneity, this mosaic is not chaotic. It has a clearly discernible pattern, wherein socio-cultural diversity draws its strength and sustenance from India’s composite culture and civilization thrust. This culture has evolved over centuries through a process of assimilation and amalgamation of the diverse cultural influxes coming with the hordes of invaders the Aryans, the Sakas, the Huns, the Pathans, the Moghuls and the Europeans. Thus the evolved composite culture of India cannot be compared either with the melting pot of American society or with the multinational state exemplified by the now defunct Soviet Union.

Communalism and national integration do not co exist. National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions and regions and speak different language we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and

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prosperous nation. Communalism, on the other hand, is used to denote attempts to construct religious or ethnic identity, incite strife between people identified as different communities and to stimulate communal violence between those groups. It derives from history, difference in beliefs and tensions between the communities.

In ancient times India was divided into many small Kingdoms and the kings of these kingdoms were engaged in fighting with each other for political power. But there was not the issue of religion. In the last century when British was ruling over India and the Indian people began their movement against the British ruler for the freedom of their motherland. The ruler tried to disturb the national integration of our country by applying the divide and rule policy to curb the movement, in pursuance of that policy to curb the movement. In pursuance of that policy they began to show their favor alternatively to this community or that. In this way they had sown the seeds of misunderstanding and jealousy in the minds of the people.

The formation of Pakistan in 1947 under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah after large scale communal bloodshed was not the end of the communal problem. Even after 1947, Hindus and Muslims in India have been at loggerheads from time to time even on the slightest provocation from either side Ahmedabad, Bhiwandi, Ranchi, Aligarh, Meerut, Surat and several other towns have witnessed situations of communal disharmony the recent years. In the aftermath of assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, riots against Sikhs were a worst black spot in post independent India. Entire Mumbai witnessed mass scale rioting in 1992 and Gurajat was engulfed in communal violence after the Godhara incident in 2002. The dialectics of constitutional patriotism versus cultural nationalism is still at play in the secular fabrics of India as a nation and therefore its divers manifestations including lynching, intellectual lynching and suppression of dissent raise their ugly heads here and there leading to bloodshed and psychological traumatisation. The cultural politics of the representation of such events in also worth pursuing. While many representations reinforce 'othering the other' and work as discourse of repression, it is pertinent to understand the role of poetry in this context. Poetry is usually less Political and more emotional. Thus more than any other genre, it can help a lot in becoming a weapon for assimilation and emotional homogenizations of the Populace.

The poem "Can You Make Out" raises some pertinent questions related to nationalisms within India and the many voices vying for approval within the cacophony of multiplicities. He makes us lend our ears to certain unheard cries amidst the dissenting declarations. Seeing the blood splattered on the road can you tell whose blood it is by smelling it? Is it the blood of a Hindu, Mulslim, a Sikh a Christian, a brother or sister. (It is not possible)

There is a Tiffin carrier half hidden among the stones that are scattered on the road. There is a sweet smell of bread coming from it. Can you tell to which caste the smell belongs? No.

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There are blood stained clothes, worn out shoes, broken cycles, books and toys. Can you tell to which nationality do they belong?

The mother is waiting for her daughter from the school without knowing that she has been killed. Can you find out the creed of those tears flowing down from the mother? And do you know the inner meaning of the cries of the wounded that are in hospital? Again a Strong No.

The author identifies the bloods that of the man whose Tiffin box emits the sweet smell of bread. The blood belongs to the caste of those who ply the bicycles, who spend their dreams among the office files. The blood stained clothes belong to the weaver, shoe maker, the farmer author, maker of toys or the man who lights up lamppost in the dark lanes of the town. The author can also light a lamp but he cannot tell the religion of the tears of the mother whose daughter is never going to come back from the school. The author can apply balm to the wounds of the wounded. But he cannot tell the inner meaning of their cries.

Vikal addresses the social issue of casteistic and religious violence and the vicious developments from the angle of conscience a humanistic concern for general well being and fellow feeling. Intolerance hurt the nice sensitive being they touch his sensitivity and hurt his soul. What is noticeable in these lines is that the victims of intolerance are not the powerful the wealthy or the ruling class but the ordinary economically unsound people of the common fold who struggle hard to make both ends meet. They toil hard they minimize their expenses, and they either go on foot or in a bicycle, and save money by bringing food from home in Tiffin carriers. But they bear the brunt of ethnic conflicts because manufacturing dissent in the name of religion, caste, creed and colour is usually strategically developed from the top and percolated into the bottom. Those at the top try to maintain a secular image of themselves, while at the grass root level, the members of a particular group clash with the other in the name of petty differences. They thus become victims of these unofficially sanctioned conflicts of identity politics and vote banks and succumb to their injuries leaving their families orphans. It leads a mother loose her daughter a wife her husband and a family its breadwinner.

All these are done in the name of differences in religion caste and creed. But finally, when it comes to casualties the blood lying splattered on the road the blood oozing from the wounds the tears welling up in the eyes of a mother and the smell emitting from the tiffin box lying on the road speaks volumes. But what they silently proclaim is not about the religion of the blood of the person lying the road speaks volumes. the ante of the sweet smell emanating from the Tiffin carrier of the person who was either killed or wounded in the ethnic clash, the nationality of the blood stained clothes or the broken toys of those who were frightened and chased away or the creed of the tears welled up in the eyes of the mother who has lost her daughter in the ensued violence. What they proclaim is that the bloodshed in the name of

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caste, colour and religion is senseless because blood knows no religion broken toys wand worn clothes know no nationality and tears know no creed. The heard and unheard cries thus go unexplained. The only answer is that the blood the smell and the tears are that of a man a human being someone belonging to the species homo sapiens.

The poem can be considered as an attempt to criticize the normalizing and homogenizing concept of nationalism and nationhood which unities heterogeneous elements under one banner, but fail to provide security when there is a separatist tendency or uprising among these unified members. The poet turns a bit cynical when he says.

*Can you tell me the nationality?
Of those blood stained clothes
Worn out shoes, broken cycles.
Books and toys? (Vikal, 12-15)*

What the poet tries to prove is that both unity in diversity and diversity ensues conflict. Conflicts are everywhere and it is the duty of the sensible and the sensitized individual to make efforts to put an end to such limiting narrow minded conceptions in order to avert such incidents in future.

The evocation of the whole concept of motherhood by the abstract concept of tears and blood in the following lines makes the description sharply critical of the condition we live in today.

*Can you tell me the creed?
Of those tears
Welled up in the eyes of the mother
Waiting for her daughter
Who will never return from school?*

The poet concludes by exhibiting his helplessness in the face of such ludicrous acts. He wants to be a lamp, he wants to light a lamp but he feels exhausted because unanswered questions can be more puzzling than mere questions or answered questions. In the poem we see a number of political happening of the century simultaneously side lined and highlighted. The scene reflects the social trauma of communal violence and the poet tries to share with the reader the sense of change in an individual's mental makeup in view of a series of conflicting events faced by him. It tells of a mission requiring active engagement, but which usually gets lost in the multitude of voices. But such cries are left unheard. So he resorts to silence because neither interpretation nor explanation of the causative factors of such inner cries will sound rational to a communally charged mob.



Here we see a conscious attempt by Vikal to separate his inability to make a cognitive analysis to comprehend the nonsensicality of those agonizing reasons from his ability to becoming a soothing presence to those being affected by excruciating mental torture. This perception of a divided self does not mean a negation per se of pressing issues in the society. What we see here is Vikal's entanglement in the socio cultural mire of the time and his aversion towards human made structures of oppression and injustice. He wants to be a light to eradicate this darkness. He wants to be a soothing balm to the wounds of the wounded. He makes language intentionally collapse by repeating the phrase. 'I cannot tell' in order to show his helplessness to bring back to life those people who were dead due to religious violence.

I too can light a lamp

But

I cannot tell

The religion of a mothers tears.

Whose daughter will never come back from school?

I can apply balm to the wounds of the wounded

But I cannot tell

The inner meaning of their cries. (Vikal 36-43)

The sharp simple and pithy lines are loaded with strong undercurrents. Couched in a natural intonation, the structures of his pivot ideas provide a sharp ethical and psychological insight into the fabric of the present day intolerant culture. He repeatedly uses theoretical questions all of them to which the inevitable answer is a strong NO. Vikal thus succeeds in emphasising again and again the futility of such endeavors. Kumar Vikal In his poetry proves that identity is complex and defies simple definition. He shows that external identity makers are always at a crossroads of nation, race, gender sexuality and class and that no person bears the privilege of being more pure than anyone else. It leads to a crisis of perception not to the victims but to the witnesses and to the kinsfolks. Kumar Vilas poetry thus connects aesthetic imagination with critical issues of race and ethnicity provides the poetic space with a different language and a different idiom

Being freed from the restraints of meter, rhyme and form his poems are a fine coalescence of tradition and modernity. As the poets of this era are mostly concerned with themselves and their surroundings, there poetry "is in its essence an attempt to see man and his world as they really are without veils and pretences." (Aurobindo 99) the poet thus decimates the conflict inducing other and coalesce all variances into the much hailed principle of unity in diversity. There is an approach to poetry that takes inspiration from the idea that "the personal is political" and combined with a trend toward confessionalism in contemporary poetry. This posits itself as political in showing and celebrating the lives of marginalized groups and individuals. These poets sound radical and attempts to transcend human borders. The borders

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can be geographical cultural, linguistic or even national. Many of such poems teach us the need for a respectful acknowledgment of the 'Other' and bellows on how we are all affected by optical delusion of consciousness'. This ability to combine social activism with poetry is seen in those poems which confess the nonsensicality of discrimination in the name of caste, colour, religion or creed. All patriotic and nationalistic poetry is by definition political. Political poetry, ancient and modern good and bad, frequently responds vehemently to social injustice, Thus the poet is Jeremiah crying out to the assembly to witness the folly, unprecedented in both West (Cyprus) and East (Kedar) of a people who have forsaken the fountain of living waters for the stagnant water at the bottom of a leaky cistern. Through the baring of deeply personal experiences, even trauma then the politics of these works draws on a sentimentalist assumption that social change can be brought about by empathy, by affective identifications. Indian poetry in English in the 1950s was strangely silent despite tremendous upheaval on the socio political and economic fronts the crisis and plunder of partition and the First World War.

CONCLUSION

A complex blend of aestheticism and activism, the poetry of Kumar Vikal produces a kind of bold ruthless honesty tearing passionately at conventional attitudes to reveal the quintessential 'human' within. It is not just a question of being human, but being humane. Though the poem has not been able to escape completely from tradition, it has a new note and a new urgency of utterance. Given the incendiary mix of religion and violence that characterizes much of contemporary global conflict it is helpful to understand this volatile combination from a variety of perspectives historical and contemporary, scholarly and activist symbolic and political. The ultimate goal of all understanding however is not just to appreciate reality but to change it. In a modest way one can hope that his effort at making sense of the nonsense of religious violence will lead to a new appreciation for the transformative capacity of poetry and its ability to lead to tranquility and to healing.

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