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A Visit to the Poetic World in Kulbhushan Kushal

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Abstract

Kulbhushan Kushal, a bilingual poet, is one of those highly sensitive and creative souls, who are born in every age to draw, depict and show the bleak and in human aspects of the age dominated by narrowness, strife, deception, self-centred barren in humanity in their respective creative works with a view poetically suggesting the appropriate path of life suitable for the purpose of overcoming this crisis, saving the humanity, protecting the living world from becoming a 'waste land' producing nothing but 'cactus'. The present study attempts to explore the distinct features and aspects of the poetic world of Kushal. In doing so, I have tried to deal with several poems of this poet both from the perspective of theme and technique.

Keywords: Poeticity, Globalisation, Aesthetic, Communication.

> God
> hath given you one face, and you make yourselves
> another. (Shakespeare's *Hamlet* III, i, l49-51)
>
> Unreal city
> Under the brown fog of a winter noon
> (T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land:* ll 207-8)

The rapid growth in the world economy, commerce, science and technology in the second half of the last century has exercised a far-reaching consequences in the socio-academic, socio-cultural spheres of both human and non-human life. The change is generally branded (with an ostensible pride) as *globalization* and the earth is called *global* village. But this global village is sans the features of our age-old village representing the innocence, intimacy, cooperation, empathy, love and peace, in one word, *humanity*. Instead it is full of those of opposites. Our country India as a part of this global village has the similar experience. The scientific, technological and economic development and consequent urbanization in different parts of our country has dimensionally affected, rather transformed the basic foundation of human life and the relationships i.e., man-to-man, man-to-nature governed by the subtle human feelings and understanding, rich and constructive tradition. Alienation, faithlessness, strife,

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distrust and moral and spiritual degeneration which are the direct off shoots of modern urbanization and along with these dominating socio-cultural features, consumerism, narcissism, populism, celebration of body and neglect of soul/spirit, loss of patience, disrespect to the traditional human values, rat-race in the pursuit of material prosperity, etc., hover in almost all the strata of life in the postmodern globalized world.

Added to this, the revolution mainly in the fields of electronics, telecommunication, information technology and other related fields has brought more ease to the life of the dominating section of the society. In the so called urban society, the techno-competent persons, be they half-educated, insensitive, immoral, prone to the physical pleasure, or material, are regarded as resourceful and creative. Instead of capitalizing the technological and commercial progress for the benefit of humanity at large, the business giants of the present time are consciously working in the direction of transforming the traditional societal value system into money-governed and pleasure-driven value system in which there is no room for traditionally nurtured subtle creative humane qualities. As an inevitable result of this phenomenal change, an individual is valued on the basis of his/her income/money, not on the basis of the human qualities. N.K. Neb (2005: 9-10), while discussing the poems of Kulbhushan Kushal in 'Introduction' to *Shrinking Horizons 1990/2005*, rightly sums up the present time:

> The present day life with a marked tendency for cut throat competition and material success has given a different direction to human feelings and emotions. Instead of the warmth of love people run after dry and tempting successes, 'Barren Successes' in Kushal's words, resulting out of a misplaced sense of values. Common human values that develop strong ties among people as a whole are now replaced with a concern for self—the self governed by will for power and wealth. This attitude reigns supreme in human relationships in the present day reality. These developments have initiated intense responses in sensitive minds concerned with basic human condition and authentic experiences. In the changed circumstances, the everyday reality and the role of human beings as active participants in the drama of life have undergone massive change. In spite of the fact that change in itself is natural, the shifting roles and understanding of life seen in recent times mark an unprecedented suddenness. This shift in the reality around and the paradigms governing its understanding have caused a major jolt to traditional human values.

Kulbhushan Kushal, a bilingual poet, is one of those highly sensitive and creative souls, who are born in every age to draw, depict and show the bleak and inhuman aspects of the age dominated by narrowness, strife, deception, self-centred barren inhumanity in their respective creative works with a view poetically suggesting the appropriate path of life suitable for the purpose of overcoming this crisis, saving the humanity, protecting the living world from becoming a 'waste land' producing nothing but 'cactus'. Kushal being well equipped with poetic insight, practical as well as philosophical experience, and creative linguistic competence has ventured to pen his deep reflective ideas/thoughts in the poems published in volumes such *Shrinking Horizons* (1990/2005), *Rainbow on Rocks* (2005), *Whirlpool of Echoes* (2006), *Songs*

of Silence (2008) etc. Now let us take and analyse some poems from these anthologies and see how the poetic self of Kushal pregnant with fragmented and illusion-free experiences gathered from his surroundings treads on the poetic space and share his ideas germinated, alchemized by poeticity.

Kushal as a man of the post modern era has experienced different shades or aspects of his time and life marked by material progress spiritual and moral degeneration. Kushal with his artistic view and skill depicts these bleak *negative* aspects in his poems. This has been done in boldly and with clear and disillusioned mind of a visionary. His poem 'Cunning Craft' with which his *Shrinking Horizons* begins exposes with images from real life experiences and applying a series of rhetorical questions how the consciously nurtured cunning or foxily mentality of present manleads him into the world of hypocrisy, alienation, disturbance, and ailment as illustrated by the following quotes from the poem:

> why do we feel
> the coils of cobra
> tightening around our legs?
> Whose cunning craft
> has transformed
> the flowers
> into weeds?
> - - - -
> Whatstrange inflection
> ails us
> what nightmares
> disturb our sleep?

In order to hide such cunning designs man, the poet records aptly in the poem 'Smiling Masks', wears the 'smiling masks' yond which 'languishes a face/eluding recall, recognition'. This poem immediately reminds us of Eliot's poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' where modern man Prufrock exposes his hypocrisy be stating:

> There will be time, there will be time
> To prepare the face to meet the faces you meet; (Lines 26-27)

Kushal in the poem 'Smiling Masks' presents that the man wearing 'a face/without ears, eyes, lips' leads a life characterized by 'melting dreams, thin 'contours', 'a tattered text reflecting,', mutilated colours', and 'silence grim'. Man with 'tattered thoughts', aspiration, and at the same time with fragile, frail and deceitful mind ultimately fails to achieve the happiness. Thus, mast appears to be a powerful symbol of deception, hypocrisy and malignity working in the deepest core of human heart. In the poem 'Dance of Masks' included in the anthology *Whirlpool of Echoes* starkly shows modern men's proneness to cover or hide the real mental states or intentions by wearing a masks of gentlemen. As a result, all the societal actions and interactions in day-to-day life are being conducted by men living behind the 'laughing' masks.

There presentation of such amechanized lifeless life of man is found in several poems of Kushal such as 'Elusive Fragrance', 'Angels of Chaos', included in *Shrinking Horizons*. All these poems with the help of images culled from the real life experience expose the rather pathetic trouble-torn hell-like condition which has been generated by man and which has snatched innocence, happiness and peace from him. Of these poems, 'Angels of Chaos' blatantly which depicts the chaotic situation i.e., anarchy is spread all over the world by the *angels of hell or evil* forces and the mere innocence is not celebrated, and cosmic forces are not paid heed to. That is why, Kushal utters:

> Hungry chaos now
> is devouring shores
> kissing homes, domes.
> ('Angels of Chaos', Lines 1-3)

As a result common people are gripped in nightmarish thoughts, anxiety and agony and the poet expresses aptly

> And we are advised
> to seek solace in the
> fractured present
> fragmented past.
> In the dangerous dark
> dance angels of chaos.
> No rest within
> No respite without.
> ('Angels of Chaos', Lines 12-19)

The three direct and inevitable consequences of this are the loss of importance of time, breaking of promises and loss of communication as depicted in poems belonging to this volume 'Time', 'Breaking of Promises' and 'Communications' respectively. It is found in all our old great works, be they religious or cultural, scientific or not, that the value of time has been upheld as the most driving force behind all sorts of creation in this universe. Kushal's poem 'Time' exhibits the poet's philosophical understanding time in relation to both microcosmic and macrocosmic world views. Time, to Kushal, does make linear movement in the form of past, present and future but a complex one. He equates time to 'a river whirling / to a sea of moments' All the civilizations have flourished only because of man's laying importance to age old ideas about time connected with creation, creativity, immortality, judgement. In both modern and postmodern age the collapse of the value of time can be realized in terms of procrastination and unproductivity. Modern man is not engaged in capitalizing the creative hours of his life which is limited. Hence, man does, as the poet observes, suffer from monotony and drudgery in busy restless life being mocked at by watch symbolizing the man's effort to divide time into several fragment in terms of second, minute, hour, etc.

> The watch laughs at us
> we laugh at the watch

we think
we can catch time
by forelock
but time
has fettered
our feet
our hand
('Time', Lines 13-21)

And so the poet with his visionary eye and reflective thought can see man grope in hopeless future:

Future is a siren
singing melodies
soothing our tense nerves
till we are tired
and willingly yield
to its embrace
and kissing the crimson lips
frantically crave water
till we discover
the mighty sea
cannot lend
a drop to drink.
('Time', Lines 29-41)

Therefore, in his evaluation of the poem 'Time' N.K. Neb (2005: 16) aptly observes Kushal's idea about time:

> His awareness of a cosmic concept of time highlights human limitations to understand its real nature and significance. Here again the poet tends to disorient our mind filled with fixed ideas that make us accept things at their face value instead of trying to unearth their real nature and relevance for human life the moments in time are treated indifferently.

With such shocking awareness and concern Kushal in his title poem 'Shrinking Horizons' conveys his sincere realisation that men's world of exposure and experience are gradually and steadily getting narrowed, fragmented and shrunk. They cannot imagine the world beyond their limited and self-centred one, and so also the ideas, thoughts, or anything relating to humanity's wellbeing and prosperity. Horizons symbolically represent those respective spheres in and beyond which human experiences get shaped but now:

Sprawling horizons now
shrinking fast
on this side o horizons
green deserts
on the side greener

greener woods.
('Shrinking Horizons', Lines 1-6)

All these the 'Adventures of ages' dignity of labour, the past history, etc., are not being honoured and so are 'melting fast' as, the poet with bleeding heart utters,

the present is
too brittle
handle with care
with acumen rare.
('Shrinking Horizons', Lines 21-26)

As a sensitive and reactionary soul or spirit, Kushal sharply reacts to such deterioration as well as degeneration of mankind in outlook and action. He with a shocked mind and heart observes that the promise keeping with which dedication/devotion, religious faith, honesty and above all sacredness were attached in every sphere of human life is now-a-days one of those fast fading phenomena necessary for peace, and love in a society. The narrowing and there by shrinking of the human selves or horizons covered by the shroud made of selfishness, heartlessness, insensitivity, envy, hatred, pride, impatience and mental, moral and spiritual imbalance/anarchy results in the inevitable non-compliance and breaking of promises. In the value based tradition the promises are considered to be identical with certainty in carrying out the works/duties assured through those (promises).

A typical product of the present mechanized society does not even feel motivated to keep the promised but rather feels elated in breaking those. The bleak aspect of the present day humanity has been blatantly attacked by Kushal in his poem 'Broken Promises'. Kushal's poetic self is always in collision with prevalent corrosive forces which do not hesitate to break the promises. The poem 'Broken Promises' (in *Shrinking Horizons*) metaphorically suggests that in our every step of life we experience the breakdown of promises relating to love, financial activity, religious duties. The promises not fulfilled at different levels and walks of life, the poet with terrified mind feels, haunt those sensitive souls including that of the poet. These promises, as represented in the poem, behave like *conscience-knockers* knocking at our every attempt in our day-to-day activities (like love making, business, religious prayer) spanning from personal/emotional one to religious one. They (unfulfilled promises) may knock even at the moment:

when we are busy
matters
of consequences
they may come
sitting quiet
in room
we contemplate
impending doom.
('Broken Promises', Lines 21-28)

Another powerful poem 'Communication' of *Shrinking Horizons* exhibits the poet's penetrating insight. As man has turned out and out an evil force wearing a mask of angel, he cannot communicate with other with the help of language corrupted with hypocrisy, deception, animosity and such other evil designs. In the midst of high flown and verbose speeches being aired profusely and loudly, communication in the true sense of the term is getting strangled, distorted and also lost in the present world of high-tech communication. Hence the poet in the tone of disgust and hopelessness tells us:

> Shower of words
> meanings ever
> elude us
> gesture comes to
> our rescue
> ('Communication', Lines 1-5)

Again in the same vein Kushal says:

> A demon sleeping
> in the den of time
> swallows our words
> strangling our meanings.
> ('Communication', Lines 22-25)

From the analysis of the poems made so far, it is evident that Kushal's poetic self appears to be agonized by the prevalent bleak state of modern urbanized humanity. The poet's experience of the life around pains him too much. Men are not hankering after the peace, happiness, spirituality, the every essences of human life, but after the material successes which are to yield mental unrest, anxiety and distrust identified with hell. This has been rightly dealt with in the poem 'Barren Successes' including in *Rainbow on Rocks*:

> It's the time when our sly smiles
> And our magic strangeness
> Invite us us to embrace
> Barren successes
> Mock satiations
> Proxy fulfilments.
> ('Barren Successes')

The sensitive poet's concern for the state as well as the fate of the contemporary humanity gets expressed in his almost all the poems dealing with the artificiality ridden urban life governed by the 'sway of projected reality instead of basic human values' (Neb 2005: 10). The poet himself has expressed his realisation and feeling about the present human existence in one of the interviews with N.K. Neb (2008: 47) where he himself holds:

> Rocks have always fascinated me for their static disposition and structure. Their imposing presence in environmental landscape corresponds with my

> psychic scope, where they provide a magnificent and meaningful back drop for the enactment of my experience. Their barren faces remind me of the inherent barrenness of the modern urbanized way of life which paradoxically, in spite of high-tech movement and mechanical movements continue to reflect rock like static presence-sound and fury signifying nothing (Insight: 47).

The main point, Kushal wants to project in the poems discussed in the present study, relates to the poet's minute observation and philosophical understanding of and approach to the present day reality of life. It seems worthy to mention that such sort of reaction can be traced in all the literatures of the world across the time and Kushal is not an exception to that. However, the way Kushal conveys his sincerely nurtured ideas in his poetical works deserves to be well-mentioned so far as the thematic choices, use of images and symbols and linguistic selections in order to translate those ideas into concrete poetical representations are concerned.

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