

A Trajectory between Interior and Exterior: A Study of Psychoanalytic Self and Ecological Self rendered in the Poetry of Shiv K. Kumar

S. Gnanaprakasam ¹

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Department of English, Annamalai University
sgnanaprakasam1983@gmail.com

Dr. J. Arul Anand²

Professor, Research Supervisor

Department of English, Wing Coordinator DDE
Annamalai University
arulanand65@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

Among the Post-Independence poets writing in English, the immeasurable contribution of Shiv K. Kumar with his free poeticism, clichés, archaism, and metrical concepts sets himself a post modernist. His poems speak about his pain, desire, parting, waiting, neurosis, and as he says ‘his troubles and agony.’ His poetry, therefore, is born of grief and suffering as a result of his severe personal trauma. Kumar is trying to share his personal experience with his poems. It would be a rewarding study if it deals about the poems of psychological exploration of his inner self. Besides, the exploration of the Psychoanalytic self Kumar has shown awareness about nature and environment with his Ecological self. Many scholars have discussed the realistic and modernist aspects of Kumar, though his ecological concern did not receive the kind of critical attention it deserves. The intention of this study is to fill that void and to discover the complex and conflicting relationship between the environment and literary sensibility of Kumar. Many of Kumar's poems have a pyramid structure as his earlier collections reflect his psychoanalytic self and become a foundation for bringing him to the top of the structure to see the outer world and its present condition. The ecological self ultimately begins to unravel. Hence Kumar's complete poetic beauty rests on the trajectory between his mindscape and landscape.

Key Words: Trajectory, Ecocriticism, Psychoanalysis, Environment, Nature, Self,

Shiv K. Kumar, born in 1921, is one of the shining stars in the realm of Indian English poetry ascertaining as the source of inspiration for the new poets of future generation. His stupendous eight volumes of poetry from *Articulate Silences* (1970), *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974), *Subterfuges* (1976), *Woodpeckers* (1979), *Trapfalls in the Sky* (1986), *Woolgathering* (1998), *Thus Spake the Buddha* (2001)

and *Loosing My Way* (2001) evince him as a major postmodern and postcolonial poet of Indian English poetry. Iyengar has rightly pointed out about Kumar's budding volumes of poetry is really true, 'his sense of form and feeling for precise evocative language, as also his restless cerebration and his edged sensibility' (Iyengar, 722). His personal experience with his family members, friends, and lady love are the major source for the composition of his 'self' and poems about general humanity, all living things, and landscape are the key aspects to illustrate that Kumar has both in his writings "Psychoanalytic self" and the "Ecological self."

The paper aims to examine the depiction of the said themes in the poems of Shiv K. Kumar. Generally, the self is an individual person as the object of its own reflective consciousness. According to a psychoanalyst Carl Jung 'the self is a totality consisting of conscious and unconscious contents that dwarfs the ego in scope and intensity. The maturation of the self is the individuation process, which is the goal of the healthy personality'. Since self is a reference by a subject to the same subject, this reference is necessarily subjective. Therefore, in literary writing, a predominant theme of the psychoanalytic self (of poet) is found. Unlike other genres of literature, poetry gives an extended space for poets to articulate their personal emotions in their poems. Shiv K. Kumar is not an exception of having written many poems as a harvest out of his self experience, likes and dislikes, and longing etc... His own personal experience occupies as a basis in the composition of his poems, thus he says in an interview 'The poems in my first collection are related to a crisis in my personal life. In all my troubles and agony, it was my mother who comforted me. She helped me to understand myself better. When I lost her, I had to come to terms with my inner self. I believe that the emotional trauma I suffered released all that poetic energy'. As a result of lot sufferings and several crisis of great intensity, he underwent, he writes poems which talk about love, sex, pain, suffering, and death. All his book of verses is rendering the different spheres of his poetic world. His poems reveal some unseen fact that lay at the back of the every subject. His poems apparently represent the nimbleness regarding experience and life and treat all such themes in different way. Singh draws our attention to corroborate 'his poetry is always an expression of the innate feeling of his protagonist in the subjective mode'. Poems like "Self Obituary", "Cerebral Love", "A Letter from New York" and "Dark Mood", evince his treatment of love and sex and demonstrate his personal outlook.

Robert C. Ziller, in his book *The Social Self*, explains 'the social self is a multifaceted analysis of the self concept based on the social nature of the self. The emphasis is on self-esteem along with self-centrality, self-complexity, social interest, identification, power, marginality, openness, and majority identification. The book relies on an approach based upon non-verbal measures of the self concept and in which the individual is asked to locate himself in relation to a field of significant others, represented in a variety of geometric arrangements using symbols of the self and others'. Therefore social self or identity of an individual is determined by the traits like, religion, culture, profession, language, and landscape. These traits become the very illustrious in constructing the psychoanalytical self of a creative artist. C.G Jung makes it clear that 'while the unconscious was important, the self was also influenced by the social norms and the world around it. The human psyche draws upon a set of primordial images that are often cross-cultural, and have been existent for a long time in the *collective imagination* of the human race itself'. The use of those indigenous or primordial images of religion, culture, profession, language, and landscape epitomize Kumar as a poet of psychoanalytic self.

In the poem "Self Obituary" Kumar's psychoanalytical self is found in the form of emotion, with his social identification as Hindu and Indian. The expression of feeling, such as loss or hope, joy or

A Trajectory between Interior and Exterior: A Study of Psychoanalytic Self and Ecological Self rendered
in the Poetry of Shiv K. Kumar

sorrow, resentment or contentment, is thus revealed by the poet's psychoanalytical self. Ultimately the poems with the personal tone blended with the realms of biography, maternal, political, and professional are the poems of his 'psychoanalytic self.' He is confused by the tradition of publishing obituary for the deceased one with the period of life and the name as the 'Obituary' of A K. Ramanujan. Since he is a member of the Hindu Arora family, his religious self is viewed as being:

A Hindu, done to ashes and bones,
Striped of headstones, announcing
My life span within a lean parenthesis,
I'd be just a ring of void for
The bruised soul to whizz through ("Self- Obituary")

At the same time, he asks to publish 'a line or two in some local newspaper even in fine print'. He is sarcastic in saying 'fine print' and end up the poem with a philosophical note that reminds a reader W.H.Auden's line 'was he happy?'. Kumar is out spoken in sharing his experience even with whores. He speaks both his bright and dark areas of his life. He believes in 'Karmic cycle' and in an interview with Indian Literary Review he said 'it is the cross which every literary artist has to bear. Once the artist comes to terms with the inner self, it becomes both an agony and an ecstasy'. He considers that the ultimate truth of an individual's life having agonized and ecstatic experience should be informed rather than the mere time span of life in obituary column.

He nearly choked off at birth
Then he breathed in the pollen mandrake
.....
If they'd not roasted him on the pyre,
One would have seen on his palms
All the zodiac signs of heaven and hell. ("Self- Obituary")

His "Shadow Lines" further, reflects his strong faith in Karmic principle. The suffering of an individual is shown as a 'configuration of shadow lines as the crisscrosses on the palms having surfaced and presaging disasters. Therefore he says:

You cannot dodge the past all the time;
it surges more sinisterly
during moments of complacency
reminding you
that you may see your doom
even in still waters ("Shadow Lines")

Besides the idea related to religious matter, Kumar has written very fantastic poems on love, sex, contemporary reality, culture and etc, to demonstrate and make obvious of his psychoanalytic self. The scholarly poem "Cerebral Love" exemplifies that the poet gets lost in search of metaphysical love during a period of thought. The poem talks of chance and love uncertainty with a central concept of 'sex' allowing one to overcome the existential limitations. The poet finds himself in a desperate temper and need to get some relief. With no physical relationship he abandons his female partner. Love-making does

not matter to him. He tends to rise above physical pleasure, which can also be seen in sexual love when he is mature. In this he says:

Even in bed
myself copulates with its own dry bones
leaving her body
pensile on the tide's crest. ("Cerebral Love")

Kumar's love poems present the theme of sex in order to demonstrate that the poet is formed in the confessional state of mind and thus in the words of Shyam M. Asnani 'his poems bear the stamp of unmistakable individuality, by turning inward, and grappling with the new and complex problems that an individual faces today'. He also identified the theme of disappointment in love and other hardships of his life, which are treated with in some of the poems, "Returning Home", "Married Too Long", "To a Young Wife", and "My Co-Respondent". In My Co-Respondent, Kumar attempts to address his own experiences of marriage and disappointment in order to seek to get rid of his own past by writing the following lines:

Just this difference though—
while you rose like some giraffe
I slouched over worms
climbing up diamond-knots of wet grass
Each night I limped into my lone self
where the dead croaked like frogs. ("My Co-Respondent")

Bijay Kumar Das appropriately reflects on these lines 'Kumar seems to be concerned with the dissection of the failure of love in marriage and his poem reminds us Lowell's 'To speak of the war that is in Marriage'. In this poem, he uses a variety of images as the narrator loses the woman to the Co-sharer and leaves for 'pastures anew' and he says:

Now that I give you the rose to keep,
let me pass through the turnstile
into the open fields
where rider less horses whinny
under the red moon. ("My Co-Respondent")

The intended meaning of the poem remains evident. The adversary in love is named the 'co-sharer,' and the sound of the poem appears presumably teasing. The rivalry in love wraps up with the narrator choosing to go to the open lands, leaving the woman to the 'co-sharer.' If love and sex is the linchpin of Kumar's poetry, the landscape and the social mores that exist in the country shape the core of it. Kumar's thought about sex and marriage is not like the other poets. His "Dark Mood" projects that man loves a woman, and that love is full of fidelity. He is in a feminist mood and he asks the man to show respect and care for his wife. He also says that man must have a physical relationship with his wife, and this cannot be prevented by perversion. That is where the poet says:

A man should come to his woman whole
not when the mind

A Trajectory between Interior and Exterior: A Study of Psychoanalytic Self and Ecological Self rendered
in the Poetry of Shiv K. Kumar

is a perverted sunflower
turning face to darkness. ("The Dark Mood")

Kumar's approach to sex is more specifically expressed in his "A Letter from New Work." His self-control is seen here. Here he is seen as a man of powerful will, and his soul is in total control. He recites his arrangement to begin his trip to a foreign country, and he finds his own self through this path. Throughout this country, his friends engage in sexual activity, but the poet effectively prevents both of these and reveals that he matures as a human being in both body and mind. The poet says:

But my soul is still my own
The other evening they came-
.....
But something held back my hand
was it damyata?
or my mother's last wish,
or a diffidence nourished
on black coffee and white bread? ("A Letter from New Work")

Marital unhappiness contributes to disloyalty and unfaithfulness in his life. He has written a number of poems focused on this idea. His mother's death stimulated his literary imagination, and he composed several poems on dying. Death has been a recurring sight in his poetry. Partition, breakup, and court dispute created a deep wound, and he published several poems representing his inner psyche.

M. H. Abrams abridges Oedipus complex 'that is ,the repressed but continuing presence in the adult's unconscious of the male infant's desire to possess his mother and to have his rival, the father, out of the way'. Kumar's love towards his father is not as much as his mother as he reiterates 'Actually, I wrote my first poem when I lost my mother. It was called "An Encounter with Death." Later, I followed it with "My Mother's Death Anniversary". I was deeply attached to my mother because I was the youngest child. When I lost her, it was like the end of the world for me. Her death closed up my entire being. This was a very dramatic moment in my life. I felt that there was no other way to articulate this feeling except through writing'. The Oedipus complex in the psychoanalytic self of the poet is apparent in the poems about his mother or opposite sex. At the same time his super ego supersedes his repressed feelings with the social settings and cultural codes to work accordingly. Therefore, "The Death of My Father" is about a son's personal grief, but the personal expands into a common human feeling.

Now I feel like a child
playing marbles down a blind alley
with a ghost whose hands weave in the air
patterns of a familiar sound ("The Death of My Father")

Kumar's growing poetic consciousness is seen in some poems in which he behaves like a wise man or a sage. He turns philosophical in these poems, and turns from personal to impersonal and observation and extend his psychoanalytic self in understanding external world with pre occupied 'collective imagination'. In his "A Dead Bird on an Electric Pole", he conceptualize the philosophy and the intransience or inevitability of death of all being. The poet says here:

The electric chair is neutral to bird,
assain and saint. (“A Dead Bird on an Electric Pole”)

Although Kumar has written infinite number of witty poems having profound meaning exploring his psychoanalytical self, his concern for the environment or ecosystem drive to label him as a poet of ecological self. To understand his label better, it is required to behold the backdrop, ecocriticism. Pramod K. Nayar highlights ‘Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards ‘nature ‘and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself with other ecological sciences and approaches.’ As an extension of Ecocriticism, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess writes ‘If reality is experienced by the ecological Self, our behaviour *naturally* and beautifully follows norms of strict environmental ethics. We certainly need to hear about our ethical shortcomings from time to time, but we change more easily through encouragement and a deepened perception of reality and our own *self*, that is, through a deepened realism. How that is to be brought about is too large a question for me to deal with here. But it will clearly be more a question of community therapy than community science: we must find and develop therapies which heal our relations with the widest community, that of all living beings.’

Further, Ecological self is central to the school of ‘Experiential Deep Ecology’ which, based on the work of Arne Naess, argues that through the process of self-actualization, one transcends the notions of the individuated ‘egoic’ self and arrives at a position of an ecological self. So long as one is working within the narrower concept of self, Naess argues, environmentally responsible behavior is a form of altruism, a "doing good for the other", which historically has been a precarious ethical basis, usually involved in exhorting others to "be good". Naess contends in his Ecosophy, the enlargement of the ego-self to the eco-self results in environmentally responsible behavior as a form of self-interest.

The ecological self in its broader sense of meaning, ‘an environmentally responsible behavior’ is seen in many poems of Kumar to demonstrate another contour in his poetry. This philosophy also believes, as Arne Naess puts it, ‘both human and non-human life forms have intrinsic values’. In his poems he delineates not only the emotions of his own self but also his ecological self as he depicts in the poems “Trees”, “Felling a Tree”, “Pavement Sleepers of Bombay”, “A Requiem for Autumn Leaves”, He has also portrayed nature as a complex phenomenon in his poetry to show the ‘fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features’. He is equally more emotional to both the themes psychoanalytical self and ecological self. The poem “Trees” deals the interdependence of the bio diversity to discover the complex relation between all life forms in order to redefine nature in a decontextualized discourse. The ecological space given naturally to form intimacy between the trees and birds is very evident in the lines:

Only birds have sanctuary
amidst their boughs
for they don't pry
into other creatures'-privacy-
wings and warbles are their discretion's
vital organs. (“Trees”)

A Trajectory between Interior and Exterior: A Study of Psychoanalytic Self and Ecological Self rendered
in the Poetry of Shiv K. Kumar

As an appeal and admonition he asks us to plant tree to ensure wisdom for our generation. He goes on to describe the embracing branches during spring time which one cannot feel in his fingertips. Kumar is scientific in his affirmation that the tree is having more span of time than human being

But who can prevent their branches
from swaying across intervening spaces
to embrace each other during springtime?
They are just deadwood till you feel
their dreams under your fingertips.
In the hollows of their trunks, lie entombed
the bones and feathers of those pigeons
who were martyred for not passing on
secrets to the enemy. (“Trees”)

Kumar is frantic in his “Felling a Tree” for the senseless ecocide done towards a major component of the ecosystem. He describes when ‘Each time the hatchet falls.... the birds fly away for fear of the unknown, and the nests drop off the branches. He questions ‘How can wood stand up against steel, water against oil, statement against its counter and in addition he forewarns:

Humiliation is lethal
when the victim has no weapons for defense,
when you have to carry your own cross
and you are your own Pyre –
fuel, flame and ashes. (“Felling a Tree”)

“Unseasonal Rain in Nagpur” expresses the poet’s apprehension about the loss of natural harmony due to techno-cultural modern life. He becomes unhappy with the unusualness of nature caused by the artificialities of mankind which transmute the rainy clouds as ‘nuclear clouds’. Therefore the sky gives unseasonal showers to coax the unripe and unwilling rose-stems to sprout. The poet is disconsolate regarding human concern for the ecological balance which in turn we face the impact and he writes thus:

I don’t want a season’s natural rhythms tempered with
Even by nuclear clouds
So used I am to fire and brimstone (“Unseasonal Rain in Nagpur”)

Like “Unseasonal Rain in Nagpur”, he continues to manifest his ecological self in the poem “O Delhi!” where he presents the surroundings of Delhi of present condition and recounts its past. It gives him only pain and disillusionment instead of attraction in the past. Bruce King draws our attention to bear out the idea ‘In Shiv K. Kumar’s poetry historical monuments, a landscape and environment are often viewed with a savage irony as part of his own sexual desires, anger at incongruities.’ The city is now heavily polluted and tainted however he uses a feminine image to present Delhi’s street condition. He ironically tries to display Delhi’s polluted reality is clearly perceptible here that gives the reader the real picture of the society. Here he says:

Your streets and alleyways were like the contours
of a Virgin's torso-taut and scented
Riding the crest of amnesia, I shook off all
my old feathers, forged a new horoscope, learnt
a new dialect. I was like another Adam inheriting
a new garden. ("O Delhi!")

Kumar is with the view of ecocentrism in his poems that 'all living things and their earthly environment, no less than human species, possess importance, value, and even moral and political rights' (M H Abrams- 100). As Pramod K Nayar elucidates 'deep ecology proposes a respect not only for all life forms but also towards landscapes such as rivers and mountains', Kumar besides all such above themes, has fused Indian sensibility with the ecological self which is vividly seen in his "Cleansing Ganga". The holy river Ganga plays vital role in Hindu family as Holy Communion for men with nature. In his 'Cleansing Ganga', he depicts how human pollute the holy river by taking a dip into it with the belief to be purified from all their sin. He ironically suggests that the human being should be cleansed from all earthly impulses forgetting the 'eternity' instead. Here he says:

It's only when they are carried down the river of time
that iron sinks into their souls.
The waters then get sullied by ritual and dogma ashes
and bones,
wilted floral offering to the dead,
...Maybe if someone could dismantle all scaffoldings
along the mother river's waistline. ("Cleansing Ganga")

As poems like "Tree", "Felling a Tree", "Talking to a Bird on My Window-Sill", clearly evince Kumar's concern for birds, and the poems 'The Squirrel', 'A Monkey Show', and 'King Cobra at the Zoo' show his disquiet over animals. As Arne Naess pointed out 'the value of non-human life is not dependent upon the usefulness of these life forms for human', the Mother Nature affords all non-human being. Not only polluting and cutting are ecocide but also exploiting the impunity and energy of non-human life by becoming authority in the name of bondage. "The Monkey Show" pictures how the monkeys are roped to hop together to entertain people and thereby collecting coin for their master. However they want freedom. The purity of freedom and the unencumbered passion of primitive man are reflected here, as nature is not for bondage but for liberation for all being which reflects in:

off to a distant vision
of an evergreen forest of fruit and flower.
Oh, to leap from one thought-bought to another
across vast spaces of freedom." ("A Monkey Show")

It is worthy to discuss about the two different dimensions of Shiv K. Kumar and to demonstrate him as mature poet emerged in Indian English poetry. The individuality resides in the modern way of thought and his special vision, which creates in him uniqueness among others. As an articulate poet, he appears before the reader whose maturity, poetic growth and development make his poems famous and unique to his reader. From the above discussion, his two selves, psychoanalytic self and ecological self, appear like a "day", which has both daytime and night time to make the day as whole. Hence the poems of Kumar have both of these elements with equal force to make his poetic 'self' complete. He helps

A Trajectory between Interior and Exterior: A Study of Psychoanalytic Self and Ecological Self rendered
in the Poetry of Shiv K. Kumar

himself to overcome his anger and anxiety, conflict, confusion and dissatisfaction with his psychoanalytic self. His ecological self nevertheless evinces his environmentally responsible and altruistic behavior.

References:

1. Kumar, Shiv . K *Articulate Silences*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1970.
2. Kumar, Shiv. K *Cobwebs in the Sun*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 1974.
3. Kumar, Shiv. K *Woolgathering*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Ltd, 1998.
4. Kumar, Shiv. K *Trapfalls in the Sky*. Chennai: Macmillan India Ltd, 1986.
5. King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987.
6. Nayar, Pramod. K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley Pvt. Ltd, Licenses of Pearson, 2013.
7. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Bangalore: Prism Books Pvt. Ltd, 2003.
8. Singh, Prabhat K. "The Poetry of Shiv K.Kumar." *A Passage to Shiv K.Kumar: From Agony to Ecstasy*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2001. Print.
9. Subbu Saraswati. "Shiv K. Kumar: An Interview." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (Summer-Fall1990): 227-238.
10. Iyenger, K.R.Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1984. Print.
11. Das, Bijay Kumar. *Shiv K.Kumar as a Post-colonial Poet*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2001. Print.
12. Seed, John "The Ecological Self" *The Trumpeter* Vol. 22, No. 2, 2006. Print
13. Amur G. S. "Poetry as Subterfuge: An Introduction to Shiv K. Kumar's Poetry", *Aspects of Indian Writing in English*. M.K Naik (Ed.) Madras: The Macmillan Company of India Ltd., 1979.120-136.