

Poetry Series

Kumar Vikram
- poems -

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Kumar Vikram(05-12-1973)

Kumar Vikram writes poems in English and Hindi. He was recently invited by Sahitya Akademi (the prestigious Indian National Academy of Letters) to read his poems at its headquarters in New Delhi. His poems are known for inverted statements, lateral thinking, continued questioning of his own self and the way the society impinges on it, dramatic situations and sympathy for the marginalised. He consciously tries to be post-colonial in spirit by transcending the post-colonial muse.

Brought up at Muzaffarpur, Bihar, where his father was professor in English at Langat Singh College from where Prof Sinha retired as its Principal, Kumar Vikram is presently working in the Editorial Department (English) of National Book Trust, India- a multi-lingual major publishing house. His publications include 'Short Essays' (collection of Essays) , 'T S Eliot: An Intensive Study of Selected Poems' (Co-author with Prof Arun Kumar Sinha) .

A Life Beyond Art

Images of joy
sneak out rather apologetically
from the drawings
of dancing squirrels
and singing birds
done up with drying up sketch pens
producing faint colours
like the voice of the mother
requiring to join the chorus □
singing songs of marriage or birth
in the neighbour's house
with her mind preoccupied with the thoughts
of her ailing son lying on bed back home.

While the painter replaces his sketch pens
as the violinist gets the discordant chords removed
for new ones,
the mother like a dancer injured in her legs
sits before the ailing son □
with the songs from the neighbour's house
jumping through the window
and settling hesitantly in the corners of the room
like a rich guest not able to enjoy
the hospitality served
in a poor man's home,
always thinking
should he have come there at all?

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Kumar Vikram

A Man Inside The Tent

There is a man inside the tent
erected some distance away
from where we live.
He lives there
and
we are told
has never ventured out.
Only his silhouetted shadow
intimidating and unusually magnified
appearing on the curtains of the tent
has been seen.
No one has conversed with him
till now,
only his voice as if coming from
a microphone
has been heard.

Interestingly
till recently
no body knew
no body had noticed
the man inside the tent.
We all thought
tent was the man,
as in childhood
the circus jokers
walking on pairs of bamboo
seemed real to us.
Only recently,
a ferocious wind
blew away for some moments
a part of the curtain
and revealed
a man sitting inside the tent.

Now wise men insist,
after the blowing away episode
the man would not live inside the tent.
He would himself demolish the bamboos

holding the tent aloft.

As we sometimes overhear
some disturbing sounds
emanating from inside the tent
as if some facade getting dismantled
rather reluctantly
and laboriously,
we all await suspiciously
for the man inside the tent
to appear
through the dent. □

First Published in 'The Asian Age', Poetry Section, 2002, New Delhi

Kumar Vikram

An Icecube

Moulded out of an element
through a chilling process
it dissolves
gets melted down
is gradually submerged
and annihilated
and assimilated
wholly, fully,
substantially
in a goblet of wine□
to make the pick-me-up
more tasteful
more wholesome
more of a worthwhile
experience

like a saint
making the world
a better place
after having endured
the tortuous self-disciplining process□
and hardened himself
peacefully,
coolly, calmly dissolves into
the wine of life—
becoming invisible
yet omnipresent,
one with elements
flowing eternally with
eternity.

Saintly icecube! □
I dare not aspire to be
your frighteningly
unidentified self,
would rather be
in the labyrinth
of self-assertions
to have some minutes

of unmitigated fame
like the models walking on the ramp
under the flickering light □
of a kaleidoscopic lamp.
I dare not be
so gentle
cool, unassuming
for it gives me
a sinking feeling
of a stone getting immersed
in a pool.□

First Published in 'The Asian Age', Poetry Section, 29 October, 2000 (New Delhi) □

Kumar Vikram

King Of The Ephemera (Ode To Media)

On this perpetual stage of chaos
actors come and dance
deliver a line or two
sometimes rehearsed
sometimes oddly extempore
before subsiding with a whimper.
here characters jump onto the stage
with the euphoric drumbeats
as accompaniments
inching towards your chest ☐
suppressing the beat inside
only to be pushed aside
by some other "breaking" characters.

Here the suta discusses
the movements of the dancers
of their unusual attires and speeches
with the sincerity of a modern day priest
who chants mantras selectively
to cut short the rituals
like the classical vocalist ☐
reciting only breathless raagas
transcending the preparatory slower ones
before an audience
too keen to hit the climax.

A picture too perfect
shot from a camera
which does not commit mistakes
of accommodating things out-of-focus,
here never would find
an unrecognised arm creeping into the frame ☐
or eyes awkwardly closed of those being shot,
for this king of the ephemera
takes care
only those alive and alert
make it to the frame
before bowing out of it
into oblivion.

First Published in 'Media Spectrum', New Delhi,2004

Kumar Vikram

The Futility Of Being A Spoilsport

Viewed from the windows
of a fast-moving train,
the cables of electricity and telephone

(held aloft by the rows of poles
appearing like the colonnade of village girls
negotiating through bridle path in the fields
with water pitchers on their heads)

seem to run with matching speed
and move upwardly
rising from the shoulder of a pole □
only to fall down rather hastily
on the next one
and to re-start rising up smoothly
from still another shoulder.

The pillars of iron
providing strength
supporting and carrying on their heads
the facilitators of modern living
however,
seem to interfere without fail □
with the ambitions of the vaulting cables
keeping them in tight leash
obstructing their ascent
as if reminding them
of their limits
of their purpose
of the limited purpose
they have to serve.

The cables, however, continuously
refuse to submit □
and like a young enthusiast
are all too willing to rise beyond their roots
notwithstanding the pillars of bondage wanting them to settle down.

This game of rise and fall

of triumph and failure
of love and hate
of temerity and its futility—
how fascinating it all appears!

But, alas, surrogate is the motion of these players
like the light of the moon! □
Once the chugging giant decides to run out of breath
and make a halt
this will all end then and there with a jolt!

This habitual spoilsport
how rightfully
it loves ending abruptly
games started by itself
never really understanding
that by halting abruptly
it never really takes the beauty □
out of the game played so far.

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Kumar Vikram

The Middle Path

A cat jumped
through the half-opened kitchen window,
knocking down in the process,
the steel-plate covering the milk in the pot.
With matching agility
I responded
to the protesting sounds
which reverberated through the dry afternoon.

By the moment I reached
the knocked-down plate had run out of breath ☐
and I found the winking cat
ruining the milk.

To allow it to drink the milk
which I no longer needed
or to shoo it away
and throw the milk down the drain
was the question.
And I answered neither—
Opting to choose the Middle Path.

I allowed the intruder to drink ☐
almost reassuring it with a readymade smile
and then, silently picking up the broomstick
like a small-time thief,
menacingly hit on its head,
displaying my human might.

(If drawn empathetically
the sight of the cat
hastily retreating
with regret, surprise and anger
flashing on its face for a split second, ☐
could become a fine piece of art.)

Then with a winning smile,
I picked up the pot
and threw the milk down the drain.

I could not have taken the risk
of encouraging an animal.

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Kumar Vikram

The Ragpickers

Blessed are those
who can carry on eloquently
about how a dog crosses a street
and how the cutlery looks graciously
as it is placed on the table
or displayed in the showcase.

Certainly the privilege
of drawing little joys
and unlimited laughter
is denied to those
who can only talk about
some unique dilemma
some unsettling
undefined moods
and moments,
some unseen,
hidden facets
of the goings on.

Pity on those
who are left
thinking,
brooding,
analyzing
about people talking
spontaneously
indulgently
naturally
about the antics of the dog
or the fine curves
offered by some new outfit.

II

The habitual ragpickers
left wrapping up
the materials of decorations
of bamboo sticks

and chairs
thrown about chaotically
amidst the stale smell
of rotten food
and used paper-plates
after the actors have left
after the audiences have clapped,
if only they
could go home
leaving behind
the unpleasant job
of delivering the materials back
after tallying
the missing items
and those at hand.

Blessed are those
who can carry on eloquently
about how a dog crosses a street
and how the cutlery looks graciously
as it is placed on the table
or displayed in the showcase
to move on
for another show
throwing words behind their back
to be collected
by the rag pickers.

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Kumar Vikram

Undesirable Hangover

When you blow off a candle
with your casually or strongly exhaled breath
many a time
you will notice
there remains
for a second or two or less
faintest possible
still assertive
trace of fire
swiftly coming down □
the thread
it had been dancing on
meeting the base
and ultimately vanishing
and leaving behind a queer smell around
of a faint whitish serpentine smoke
which also follows it
in a second or half or more.□

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