

I B.A. English

Semester – I

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Unit –V Short Story

Prepared by

Ms. H. Rakhiba,

Assistant Professor of English.

To Nun with Love

- Shiv K. Kumar

Shiv K. Kumar, the modern English poet and short story writer is a wizard of words. He is well known as an intellectual. Kumar's stories centre round delicate but striking portraits of human relationships with varied combinations of characters. The stories of Shiv K. Kumar have four facets – sociological, cultural, moral and psychological. His plots move round the pains of life originating from the conflicting calls of head and heart or the nonconductive family situation.

Spiritual love and religious faith form the keynote of the story *To Nun with Love*, which is by far the best of all the stories of Kumar. The true significance of love, which is 'Beyond Love' meant "profound understanding" here touches its zenith with a Miltonic blend of Christianity and humanism. Sister Jasmina, a nun and Headmistress of Jesus Primary School, Gondipally, and the unnamed letter writer who is one of the guardians who takes his little daughter to school every day, are paradoxically complementary figures to each other. Both are equally ignorant of the higher meaning of love and the real identity of their inner beings. Having renounced a rich family life, the nun believes that she has conquered the physical senses and is therefore qualified to be reckoned as incorruptible. But the three love letters of the man leave her shaken to the very core of her belief. The desire to scan her own beautiful body becomes irresistible and the window panes of her school office become mirrors pronouncing her sharp contours. She is disturbed to feel that she was exposed blasphemously to the evil. In her agitated state of mind she moves to the confessional as though she were a sinner. But the clergyman fails to

answer her question. This is suggestive of the limitations of a dogmatic truth. Indeed, it is her lack of awareness of the sacredness of her “accursed” beauty that leads her to intense mental conflict. But when she receives the last love-letter, all her apprehensions come untrue and her religio-moral crisis ends into affirmation. She achieves a state of bliss as the rose studded “scented azure envelops” finally wake her up from the “azure leaden sleep” of ritualistic beliefs. She emerges as a Keatsean angel of beauty.

The married man, on the other hand, whom Sister Jasmina considered as the agent of evil determined to destroy her glory of renunciation, finally turns out to be a realized soul. His apparently unholy fascination for her physical self gradually unfolds to him the mystery of body-soul relationship. Sensuous love becomes a means to develop spiritual union with the unseen and the unknown. This perception of the divine in the temple of the body offers the philosophy of detachment through involvement. In this experience of love getting elevated to spiritual heights it is really difficult for the reader to say as to who helped whom more than the other. Jasmina’s abstinence and escape from Gondipally to Zaminabad and the man’s indulgence and pursuance both end up at the same point, a point where all contradictions meet and merge into the highest unity of being symbolized in the story by the fragrance of the vermillion rose.

Shiv K. Kumar is more interested in painting the mindscape of the characters, in studying the complexities of human behaviour. He stands in the tradition of a psychological short story writer. His stories deal chiefly with the push and pull of psychogenic stresses. There is a great emotional vitality in his reader friendly narrative. His stories present an aesthetic combination of lyrical evocation. Extra marital relationship is one of the themes of Kumar’s stories. Conjugal incompatibility which forms the content of many of Kumar’s stories, has been invariably used for presenting, besides other things, the clash of egos, the conflict between intellect and emotion. The writer of the letter as well as his wife is an example of characters undergoing the clash of egos and conjugal incompatibility.

Kumar’s frequent but varied returns to the themes of fidelity and betrayal in his fiction affirms his story interest in the predicament of man’s loneliness and isolation. He reveals the true selves of his characters, both male and female. He

exposes both the coquetry of the wife and the philandering of the husband. He neither presents wives only as devoted worshippers nor husbands only as considerate and affectionate ones. Instead, he probes judiciously into the complex psychology of ill-matched couples.

Kumar's delineation of female characters is both delicate and sensitive showing his careful attempt at perceiving their inner urges and discomfitures. Jasmine in *To Nun with Love* provides ample evidence to the fact that the writer has tried firstly to incapacitate the image of woman as an enigma and secondly to get them released from their gender-prison and make them assertive.

Kumar takes up a simple incident and experience from the vast expanse of life around in the world and invests it with aesthetic qualities and true excitement heightened by the use of irony. His romantic sensibility and aesthetic perception have made his tales testaments of love, compassion and freedom.
