

Creative Marvels of Susheel Sharma's Writing Style in *The Door is Half*

Open: An analysis of Images, Symbols, Metaphors and Allusions

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Abstract:

The Door is Half Open, written by prolific poet Susheel Kumar Sharma, is a poetic painting which reflects multifarious shades of life in form of 52 poems. It is said that painting is a poetry which can be seen rather than felt and poetry is a painting that is felt rather than seen. S.K.Sharma's collection of poems is huge collage of different paintings replete with immense imageries, metaphors, similes, allusions and symbols. The title of the book "The Door is Half Open" is in itself a symbol, a replica of life, of hope and faith. This paper is a brief analysis of the collection to help the readers to seek a new world. It will also reflect the desire of the poet to explore something hidden, unexplored and unnoticed and readers will get an opportunity to make assumptions by getting fragmentary glimpses of the integral devices used to convey the depth of multi-layered meanings.

Keywords: Imageries, glimpses, replica, metaphors, similes, allusions and symbols.

1. INTRODUCTION

The collection of 52 poems starts and ends with the poems "Ganga Mata- A Prayer" and "Liberation at Varanasi." Both the poems echo the hymnal slogans like "tvadamajjanat sajjano durjano va/vimanaih samanaih samaniyamnah/samayati tasmin puraratile/puradvara-samruddha-dikpalaloke/ Mokshadayani Ganga!/Ganga tav darshanan muktih" (p.9) and "Har har Gange" and "Har har Mahadev"(p.91) to show that the poet wants to expiate his sins and attain *moksha* for the purpose of the union of his "aatma" (soul) with the Supreme one (the *Param*) so that finally they become the "*paramatma*". These poems are overflowing with imageries like visual, auditory, kinetic imagery. Both the poems symbolise speaker's desire to emancipate. He is tired of worldly evils like pollution, corruption, degeneration etc. He wants to peep inside the hidden world created by God as it is very well sung that " Suravar Munivara Jinke Charan Me/ Nishadin Shish Jukate Hai/ Jo Gaate Hai Prabhu Ki Mahima, Wo Sab Kuch Paa Jate Hai/[Apne Kasht Mitane Ko Tere, Charano Ka Vandan Hoga/ Jinki Pratima Itni Sundar, Wo Kitna Sundar Hoga."

The form of the poems and symbols, metaphors, images and allusions in it are from the tradition yet they defy it; they represent the scholastic world and yet are taken to the ordinary people. In his Introduction to *Gitanjali* W. B. Yeats wrote: “[*Gitanjali* comes of a] tradition where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble.”

The poem “Spineless - II” is twelve similes in an equal number of stanzas. Each stanza defines conscience through a simile. The poet has presented conscience as an expendable entity which remains inept at the time of crisis. The narrator compares his conscience to a pen that fails to write in the examination hall (the moment when it is needed most); to a ferocious cat that uses its power on a timid rat (the game of power); to sugarless pudding (that is so tasteless); to a cautious drive that finally leads one to an accident (what an irony); to an old father who forgets to return to the ancestral home (loss of roots/tradition/racial memory); to a vintage car that refuses to move (at the moment of proud display in the vintage car rally); to a bulb that glows during the day time (when it is not needed). All these and many other images in the poem show that the conscience fails to guide the narrator in the moments of crisis. The moral crisis in the contemporary world is because of this duplicity only – if conscience does not guide one at the right moment it is almost like having an open field with no barriers of morality. Every image that Susheel employs in the poem to depict the moral dilemma of the narrator is a unique one and the meaning and association are not apparent in the first instance as happens with a metaphysical conceit. Therefore, one has to relax and ponder over them to decode their meaning (1,2-5).

In “Routine” the poet is giving a slant of his experience of a day which was like any other routine days. While waiting for his chauffeur to bring his drive, he notices different people carrying forward their daily activities. The poet has used simile to compare these moments of endless wait with long days when Sita waited for Lord Ram and finally he realizes that his chauffeur would not come because he (the former) had retired the previous day (7,8,14). He feels that this day has brought an unexpected change in his life.

It had been a regular day

Like many others that had passed unnoticed

Or, like the unknown face of a person in the crowded market

Or, like the unrecognisable face of a beggar at mosque

Or, like the familiar faces one meets in one's street

Or, like the sights of the labourers

Raising up buildings unnoticed. ("Routine" p.16)

The repetition of "or" and use of words like "unknown", "unrecognisable" and "unnoticed" in these lines symbolise speaker's restlessness, irritation and fear to get disappeared in the mob. He wants to retain his own identity even after his retirement. The poem highlights the conflict between the true and the false identity and the role of external forces/circumstances in completing the search. The borrowings like "salaam" and "agni pariksha" from Urdu and Hindi language add extra flavour to the poem.

The poem "Dilemma" depicts the plight of a person who is wavering between two different thought processes. His grandfather who took birth with a silver spoon in his mouth but unfortunately he was rendered a poor. But he wanted to live with dignity and prestige throughout his life (16,17-19). Here the question that the poet puts is:

Is it really possible for one

To remain poor and

Also to hold the head high? ("Dilemma", p.17)

This question is all the more important because the *Bible* not only glorifies poverty (Matthew 19:24) but also preaches the moral value of humility and submission (Ephesians 4:2). The poet has used Alliteration of /h/ sound which depicts the intensity of the speaker's feelings and his cravings to know what is more important, Inner Bounty or Outer Richness, Self-respect or Self-proud.

People hated my grandpa

For he held his head high.

His neighbours who had helped him and

As he should have been—

Holding his head high

Despite being poor.

Is it really possible for one

To remain poor and

Also to hold the head high? (“Dilemma” p.17)

The poem “Hope is the Last Thing to be Lost” is swarming with Visual imagery, Olfactory imagery and Tactile imagery along with Personifications. Here Dream and Hope are personified very beautifully to mark the difference between vulnerable desires, earthly hopelessness and inner purification and hopefulness.

The damp dream

Was being dried in the open

When the Sun was covered

With green clouds. (visual imagery, p.84)

The dream could be

Dehydrated then. (Personification, p.84)

I’ve to forget my body

And, the ant’s crawling over it (Tactile imagery, p.87)

The smell of the simmering samosas doesn't matter

Nor does the sweaty smell of the body

Nor even the aroma of South Indian Coffee. (Olfactory imagery,p.87)

Hope descends from the sky

Spreading its wings. (Personification, p.88)

The poem starts with weird action of drying the dream in the sun then roasting it in the electric oven just to finish it up. The poet has remarkably shown that how people have become materialistic and want to purge themselves into carnal desires but slowly the speaker finds salvation by following the path of great people like Buddha and finally comes to the conclusion that one has to his own "Guru" to salvage the savage (11,12-15). One has to be hopeful in life that one day he will enter the door of heaven to meet the Almighty.

In the poem "Vicious Circle" the poet makes his characteristic shift from the visual to the conceptual thinking. He starts with a rhetorical question "Why did my uncle go to Basra" (p.18) and conveys that he is disappointed at his uncle's decision of going to a war. He is not sure whether his uncle realized the gravity of it or not. But later he admits that he is allured by the idea of going to the battle-field because he had the responsibility to bring home the bacon.

The poem "Grief" depicts the feelings of a poet. In the narrator's views, no one can fathom the intensity of a poet's loneliness. He remains in pain but he still manages to scoop out the pearls of creation from the sea of grief. This poem is laden with magical metaphors like "flowers of hell" and "seasons of evil". The title of the next poem "Strings" suggests the idea of being connected to the inner self. It shows the cravings of the inner soul to give a lasting try to repent over its sins. The conscience is not completely dead. The use of visual imagery in the line "The rising smoke/ From my heart" (p.22) displays the existence of a tiny spark trying to take the form of a fire within himself. The use of simile in "Bringing in new books is/Like bringing in an empty pistol" (p.22) adds to the expanse of the poem. The conscience of the speaker is not dead and

wants to shed off the burden of nothingness so that it can start afresh and find the light of hope in the world of hopelessness (6,7,10-13).

In the poem “Dwellings” Despair is personified and given importance more than Hope. The use of simile in the line “Hope passed by like a stranger on the road” depicts the indifference of Hope towards the speaker.

I have started

Living in the home of despair

For the house of hopes has been shattered (p.23)

The poem comes to an end on an optimistic note by pointing out the quality of despair which emerges due to its undesirability; it is safe from curses and jealousies. He thinks that despair is somehow better than hope as at least one does not feel disheartened when despair is shattered like hopes often do. Moreover, despair will neither give skin deep wounds like hopes often do nor will it desert a person suddenly. This poem brings to mind the following couplet of Jigar Moradabadi: “*Rafiqoon se Raqib achche, jo jalkar nam lete hain, Gulon se khar behtar hain, jo daman tham lete hai*” (Enemies are better than friends, whoremember one; Thorns are better than flowers, as they catch one by heart).

“Meditation” leaves one pondering over the reality of the inner darkness that dwells within each one of us. The poet has beautifully used visual and auditory imageries to enhance the texture of the poem. The moment the narrator starts meditating he only finds dragonflies buzzing and hovering over weeds. The weeds symbolize the evil deeds committed by a man and the dragonflies symbolise conscience whose continuous jarring sound keeps on disturbing the meditator. The narrator is trying his best to come out of the mire but fails – it is not so easy to overcome temptations. In her ‘Afterword’ Barbara Wühr writes that one should not consider the dark side of one’s being as something abnormal: “It is a part of one’s selves like Indian gods have both sides: good and evil” (p. 118). But the narrator is disturbed in his real life by seeing abysmal darkness inside him:

I have been listening

To my silence

To fathom my darkness

That is deep enough. (“Meditation”, p. 25)

The next poem “Inquisitiveness” focuses on the poet’s restlessness on the questions put by his children. For him, the questions are “not innocent” but this is not acceptable. It is said that “innocence” itself means “in-no-sense” which means an innocent child is away from the ways of the world. The children just want answers of their queries. They keep on asking the narrator about various topics related to their coming into the world, their divergent looks etc. The following lines of famous Hindi poet Surdas on such a theme immediately come to my mind: *“moso kahat mol ko leenho tu Jasmat kab jayo? Gore Nand Jasoda gori tu kat syam sarir?”* (He tells me that I am not born of Yashoda and that I have been purchased. Both Nand and Yashoda are fair skinned, how come you are brown?) However, the narrator is successful in diverting the children’s minds and somehow manages to get them into bed, ignoring their questions but he has a gut feeling that they will question him again and he won’t be have an answer. This sort of problem is a very culture specific – it talks about a society where monogamy is practiced, divorce is looked down upon and the children are supposed to be born out of wedlock alone. But, with the impending globalisation the values are changing in India as well. Thus the poet is hinting about the problems Indian families may face in times to come with increasing promiscuity and extra-marital relationships – the worst casualties in such cases are the children. The repetition of the sentence “it was not full of innocence”, “the question wasn’t innocent” conveys the speaker’s dilemma that how such questions can come into children’s mind which are very difficult to answer (12-14).

It is very well said by Leigh Hunt that “Colours are the smiles of Nature” and these smiles can be found in the first part of the poem “Colours” where the poet has splendidly used visual and kinetic imageries.

And the yellow leaves

Dancing from branches.

Being burnt by the gardener. (p.77)

The speaker remembers the Garden which symbolises heaven and praises the enamoured beauty of it but later on he realises that nothing has left in today's mechanical world. Everything belongs to Nature has been crushed brutally. The following lines of famous Nature poet Wordsworth on such a theme immediately come to my mind: "The world is too much with us; late and soon/ Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers/ Little we see in Nature that is ours".

The next poem "Democracy" is a remarkable satire on today's political world. Fake promises, spurious consolation and false pretence are the apparel of politicians. Common people are confused and want the true form of democracy. The list of heart piercing but genuine questions reminds me of a song "Earth" sung by Michael Jackson:

What about sunrise?

What about rain?

What about all the things

That you said we were to gain...?

What about killing fields

Is there a time

What about all the things

That you said was yours and mine...?

Did you ever stop to notice

All the blood we've shed before?

Did you ever stop to notice

The crying Earth the weeping shores?

The next two poems “Tiny Tot” and “Vanity” are indeed very admirable poems and express the desire to live life up to the brim. In “Tiny Tot” the speaker repeats the sentence “ It’s joy to be young” which conveys his urge to remain a toddler throughout his life and in “Vanity” a man despite being very weak and tattering due to old age wants to live. Like a child he wants to draw others’ attention and doesn’t want to be ignored. The poem can also be read in the light of Edna Vincent’s statements: “Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age. The child is grown, and puts away childish things. Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.” Both these poems are presented in form of symbols which depicts human cravings for immortality and unending youth (17,18,20)

The poem “Saviour” has surely put reality into a mythical situation. It is highly symbolical poem in which the narrator is enjoying the flight of success, “And was happy to see my height/ I was at the top”(p.34). He is soaring higher and higher quite eager to touch the zenith of eminence. Suddenly, he gets struck by an eagle which symbolises hurdle caused by other jealous people. But deep inside his soul, he has the feeling of being protected by someone unseen, untouched and unheard. He is enveloped by the purest clouds and sees the eagle going down to taste the fruit of failure.

The poem “Poverty: Some Scenes” is a highly descriptive poem, full of numerous visual images. The old and poor people driven away by the police to make the poverty invisible; some street dogs pouncing on a pet dog and the dog owner’s shouting at them to rescue her pet; a sickening movement to a hospital etc, all depict the same thing i.e. poverty, the helplessness of the poor and the indifference of the rich. The poem “At the Hospital” depicts the scene of a hospital considered to be a life giving place. People go there with hope and faith but now it has become a business centre minting money all the time:

The heart jumps

Like a football

Crying ‘Do this, do that’

‘Ay, sister here, ay, sister there’

All useless,

Only the sky is silver.” (“At the Hospital”, p. 41)

The poems like “Agony”, “For a Bride Who Thinks of Suicide” and “Nithari and Beyond” are satires on the so-called civilized society. They show a very macabre and gruesome picture of the present life and time. Use of similes, compound words and imageries has enriched the poems. The poet has dealt with many prevalent social issues like gang rapes, child molestation, murders and female foeticides, suicide committed by the brides, bother about the old ones, fake colleges with fake degrees, the vanishing idea of democracy etc through different literary tools. In the poem “Agony” similes are used for woman who has become the victim of gang rape to create a strong impact: “Like a helpless woman/like a caged bird/like a small kid, like a religious mother. “Saraswati riding a golden peacock” is sarcastic visual imagery to show how wealth has blind folded wisdom and people’s conscience. Similarly words like snow-capped, multi-storeyed, well-dressed, young brides, lovely brides, decked brides, glowing brides glittering brides etc. gives the poems of S.K.Sharma a different texture and flavour (15-17).

The poems “From Left to Right” and “A Poem for My Country” are the replicas of today’s scenario. They are snide remarks on the present life style. The first one is the visual imagery of a monotonous city life where people do not have anything to feel proud of. They talk about the glorious past in order to lessen their guilt:

They are not tired of

Bragging about the

Achievements that once was.

Like a dog

Digs out the dry bone

Kept for a thin day... . (“From Left to Right”, p. 51)

Among these heart rending poems those like “Heavenly Love”, “Beloved”, “A Wish” and “Gopalpur on Sea” are highly descriptive and explicit poems. They are charged with beautiful imagery and awe-inspiring metaphors:

Brides are the carriers of tradition

Brides are the need of the civilization

Brides are the solace of bleeding hearts

Not to be trampled and kicked

But to be embalmed with care. (“For a Bride who Thinks of Suicide”, p. 61)

The poems “Heavenly Love” and “Beloved” convey the message of platonic love ignoring the boundaries of caste, creed, beauty and wealth. These poems prove that true love remains untouched by earthly things and finally leads a person closer to divinity. The poet does not love his beloved for her physical beauty and disarming smile etc as he says,

If I love you

I love you for God’s sake

He is your creator

And a perennial source of eternal love. (“O Beloved”, p.69)

In the poem “Shattered Dreams” similes have been used to enhance the gravity of it, “Like the World Trade Centre/ Like stars on a night full of clouds/ Like Bush gathering evidences against Laden.”

Other poems like “One Step Together”, “Camouflage”, “Across the Lethe”, “Handcuffed”, “In the Lap of Nature”, “A Racist Attack”, “Struggle”, “Masquerade”, “Relationships on a Holiday”, “Swan Song”, “Mirage”, “Rivers”, “Yama”, “Bludgeoning of Chance”, “Passing By”, “Granny”, “Contemplation”, “Purgation” are the epitomes of the poet’s ideologies on different subjects associated with ebb and flow in human relationships.

2. CONCLUSIONS

At the end, it can be concluded by quoting the thought of J.R.R.Tolkein who asserted that “From the ashes a fire shall be woken/A light from the shadow shall spring/ Renewed shall be blade that was broken/ The crownless again shall be king”, S.K.Sharma has lived these lines by breathing a new life to dormant emotions and dead conscience of the readers through his collection of wonderful poems and while completing a long voyage of human life filled with conflicts and desires to bring everything back to its place, the poet has used images, similes, metaphors, hyperbole, irony, satire and personification so that they can appease the reader’s soul for a while. The themes of his poems keep on reverberating in our minds and force us to close our eyes and think for a while “Are we really living or only breathing?”

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