

Cosmic Beckonings in the Poetry of Manas Bakshi

Dr Shubha Dwivedi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, A. R. S. D. College, University of Delhi, New Delhi – 110021

ABSTRACT

Publication Info

Article history :

Received : 16.11.2021

Accepted : 17.12.2021

DOI : 10.30949/dajdtla.v17i1-2.8

Key words:

Transcendental, eternal, possibilities,
cosmic awareness, cohesiveness,
change

Corresponding author :

drshubhad146@gmail.com

Poetry is essentially, a synthesis of different facets of life, with one of its professed goals being to improve life and make the world more sustainable, egalitarian, and just for all. As a representative figure, the poet transcends space, time, gender, culture and other barriers to convey the imperatives and truths of the human condition. While the poet churns his/her experiences through myriad states of consciousness, he/she helps us see the beauty, the sublimity, the glory as well as the horrible realities of the times. It is in poetry that we see the confluence of all point of views, all disciplines and all physical/spiritual explorations. It is precisely for this reason that Matthew Arnold and other literary figures have accorded poetry a higher status than religion (Arnold, 161). Poetry embodies the universal flux, the inescapable external reality to which we are hopelessly tied to, but it also helps sever the bondages and discover the true essence of the self. According to Indian knowledge tradition, the best poetry is that which permits us to fathom the limitless, eternal, and indestructible. Most importantly, poetry extends a ray of hope to readers who can envision possibilities in an otherwise tragic, factionalized, strife-ridden world through her dialogic processes. It cures, consoles, rejuvenates, and resuscitates through its redeeming features. Poetry, as the “breath and finer spirit of all knowledge” (Wordsworth), enhances one's sensitivity, refines one's taste, and brings man, the world, and nature closer together. While Millennials and Gen Zs strive for social and environmental change, Mr. Manas Bakshi's contemplative poetry with its cosmic awareness and cohesiveness dispels the darkness of ignorance, materialism, and differences that pervades the world landscape. The poet's vision, his insights facilitate readers in connecting with both external and internal reality, consequently, assisting in their spiritual growth.

“Kavyanandabrahmanandasahadhora” is a central precept in Indian Poetics, in which there's a definitive attempt to equate the 'poetic bliss' with 'spiritual bliss'. Accordingly, the Indian thought tradition accords the highest honour to creative aesthetic practises such as sahitya, kavya, shilpa, natya, or chitra—and even notes distinctive parallels in “rasananda” or “rasanubhuti” and “Brahmanandasahadhora.” The relationship between poetic experience and the 'self's' integration with 'Brahman' or the ultimate principle goes deeper and is more profound than one can fathom. The affiliation between poetry and spirituality goes a long way as both the practices entail 'consciousness' as well as the 'celebration' of the 'self.' Neither unusual nor implausible, the synthesis of the two opens up infinite possibilities for “a wandering self,” caught up in inexplicable vastness, nonetheless, gradually awakening and awaiting the 'final dip' in the words of poet, philosopher Manas Bakshi. Both the practises bear an astonishing resemblance to each other, and both seem to be endowing humanity with a sense of harmony and a balmy tranquillity. Indeed, both the poetic and spiritual processes necessitate deep concentration, reflection, and ordering of the mind, body, and soul into one collective unit. As poetry quite evidently is an expression of the 'self'; spirituality is an awareness and acknowledgement of the 'self' too. While poetry and spirituality both stem from a suffering or agonized soul, both offer solace by bringing one closer to the divinity by restoring one's faith in the supreme powers via the divine scheme of things. Poetry, overall is read and appreciated for its cathartic therapeutic properties, and devotional poetry cleanses the reader of any Sanskaric impurities or evident superfluities: avidya, ahankara, asakti, and atmmugdha and so on, thus bringing the reader closer to their higher selves and the universe.

Devotional poetry is known to be exerting powers to reform as well as transform one's life and therefore, seems to be extremely beneficial in times when people seem to have lost their emotional and spiritual moorings. While poetry helps us in navigating our life's clatter and clamour, devotional poetry enables us to see beyond our mundane existence and forges a link between the self and the world, further connecting us to the ecosystem and life itself. While one has read, enjoyed, and derived a great deal of strength and succour from the devotional verses of Milton, Donne, William Blake, Hopkins, and T.S. Eliot, among others, one also feels that all great poetry somewhere touches the soul and offers unimaginable support to the weak, the helpless and the lost. At its best, poetry is the purest kind of delight that can be equated to spiritual rapture. Carolyn Forché eloquently highlighted poetic language as possessing spiritual zeal when she stated, "Poetry is the soul's voice, whispering, even rejoicing singing." Among Indian English poets, the chief practitioners of devotional poetry were Rabindra Nath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, A K Ramanujan, R. Parthasarthy, Gieve Patel, and many others, who dwelled in the possibilities of human existence and lauded the Indian way of life. Indian English critics K R Srinivasa Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhaiyah, Krishnan Rayan, Sri Aurobindo, Suresh Chandra Dwivedi too have cited the superior functions of poetry and have encapsulated their belief in poetry as a fitting medium for the exposition of higher truths. Besides being pleasurable, poetry contributes to intellectual expansion 'chittavistara' or 'lokottaraahlada' and is thus desirable and necessary in the present day, time and world, since humans appear to be sinking in a life of sensual pleasures and regressive practises. It is with this background that we need to read and appreciate poetry of Manas Bakshi who has been writing for the spiritual 'release' and spiritual 'upliftment' of the mankind from the last seven decades. Manas Bakshi is a remarkable poet who has engaged in extensive contemplation and meditation on all facets of life, and his poetry carries the imprint of his genteel and compassionate demeanour. The insights he offers in his recent book have garnered widespread praise and recognition for him during a period of emotional bewilderment, existential uncertainty, and dread of the unknown triggered by the pandemic's unprecedented nature. Published in 2020, *Soliloquy of a Sailor* will be remembered for providing comfort to those lying low in spiritual wealth and craving for mental and spiritual well-being. Bernard M. Jackson, D.C. Chambial, Dr. Kazuyoshi Ikeda, Rosemary C. Wikinson, Patricia Prime, Michael L. Adams, and several national and international newspapers, journals, magazines, and other publications have recognized his creative endeavours. While true religious poetry can actually benefit "Mokshatur," or people seeking release from 'samsara', or the cycle of death and rebirth, one sometimes gets the impression that the absence of sincerity in devotional lyrics renders those insignificant or ineffectual. T. S. Eliot, the twentieth-century poet, was also intrigued by the idea of devotional poetry and examined its endeavour to bridge the chasm between human and society, as well as human and the Divine. In *After Strange Gods* (1933), Eliot hurtles through the aspects of revival and resurrection, elucidating the significance of religious verse:

Why, I would ask, is most religious verse so bad; and why does so little religious verse reach the highest levels of poetry? Largely, I think, because of a pious insincerity. The capacity for writing poetry is rare; the capacity for religious emotion of the first intensity is rare; and it is to be expected that the existence of both capacities in the same individual should be rarer still. (Eliot, 29)

However, Manas Bakshi's poetry is sincere; his voice is authentic and committed to spiritual nourishment of a race mired in anguish, despair, narcissistic behaviour and futility of

existence. Manas Bakshi is essentially a poet, “a man speaking to men,” (Pope) about limits of mortality and the illumination of divinity within the 'self.' His anthology explores the various consequences of decayed human life and the discord that has crept in because of the disassociation between human ambitions and the global ecosystems encompassing rivers, mountains, foliage, floating clouds, blue skies, indigenous people, and verdant pastures resplendent in their natural glory but losing their vigour as a result of the din and chaos created by the heavy demands imposed by ideals of growth in current globalized context. It is against such a backdrop that poetry becomes an apt medium of expression for a sailor cum seeker and echoes the voice of a “restless self.” Mr. Bakshi is accredited with over a dozen volumes of poetry, as well as several other publications and research articles for which he has received numerous awards and accolades. His poetry carries the influence and 'traces' of dominant poetic traditions and, yet, the masterful blend of eastern and western poetic and intellectual traditions are quite unmistakable there. He draws inspiration from the Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishadas, as well as the great exponents of English poetry such as Tennyson, Browning, Keats, Shelley, Hopkins, and Eliot. His poetry seems to be inspired by the writings of Tagore, Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurti and Sufi and Bhakti poets of Indian subcontinent. Nonetheless, his creative voice is distinctively his own and rather ingenious in its ability to synthesize disparate life notions and principles as it renders them a new form and character. Without a doubt, the poet within him functions as a catalyst for emotions, ideas, truths, and diverse sensibilities. Thus, he carries a strong tradition of writing and thinking with him, and with this train of thought, he practically ignites a creative revolution. Among many metaphors and striking analogies, the anthology dwells on the archetype of man as a sailor encouraging us to think about the various possibilities that are there before a person. Man as a wanderer is an archetype that writers, historians, and philosophers have repeatedly used to inspire us to undertake real and spiritual journeys of self-discovery. This archetype is also one of the twelve primordial archetypes defined by Jung as immediately identifiable in people. In keeping with Jungian theory, Bakshi's Sailor/ poet-persona comes around as an explorer, seeker, wanderer who relinquishes 'the known' in order to explore and uncover 'the unknown.' The romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron, as well as the early romantics Gray and Blake, reflected on the moral, spiritual, metaphysical, artistic, and intellectual journeys undertaken by individuals in search of a larger meaning or purpose in life. Bakshi speaks plainly and directly about the world, the self, and the relationship between the two. It is also one of his assertions that by being creative one can be closer to the truth. The ideological dissensions, scepticism, culture of disbelief nothing seems to prevent him from his voyage or quest beyond life.

India, the 'spiritual capital of the world' has been a witness to the proliferation and convergence of several schools of spiritual thought ever since the dawn of civilization. From yogis, rishis, sadhus, sadhvis, maharishis, tantriks, mystics, sufis, and others, we have seen all the spiritual embodiments, and the western world too has recognised the land for its potential to awaken the inward eyes of individuals, by teaching the world the powers of meditation, and explaining the mystery of life and death, as well as the worldly states of *sukh* and *dukh*, in other worldly terms, along with the true goals of life; the philosophy of universal oneness through the ideals of “*Vasudhaiva kutumbkam*” among many other empowering thoughts. Despite the numerous reservations made about the explanations offered by ancient India's knowledge system, we continue to dabble and absorb and internalize these experiences as propounded by numerous prominent spiritual philosophers and Manas Bakshi is no exception. As a wise and

compassionate being, the poet is capable of creating and constructing profound thoughts that hammer home the reality of life and death. The following are the significant spiritual ideas that run throughout the anthology, *Soliloquy of a Sailor*: The human experience is fundamentally a journey. We are essentially wanderers. We seek externally and internally. We want happiness, comfort, health, and wealth; we seek ideas, meanings, substance, essence, and significance. We look here and there but fail to look within; the greatest meaning is to be found within and the external world is mithya or maya. Self-awareness or true knowledge resolves all confusion and uncertainties, and offers closure to all human understanding. And it is just this perception of truth that is the basis of pure happiness. In the midst of religious cacophony, bigotry, fanaticism, and terrorism, the poet sends out messages of love, peace, and harmony, all of which contribute to the growth of one's own state of consciousness. Extremists perform absolutely heinous crimes in the name of a revered faith, wreaking havoc and shocking the poet's sensibilities. All forms of violence and intolerance obstruct the free flow of energy throughout the cosmos, thus emphasising the need of universal peace and harmony as revealed in the section titled "Wayside Wonders":

Heinous massacre and plunder
In the name of a sacred religion,
Tricky onslaughts unleashed by fanatic marauders
No panacea for
Religious anarchism, mindless terrorism
Unless one is humane
To follow the preaching of coexistence
With everyone everything
In this worldly ambience. (p.36)

To reconnect with one's inner treasures and also with the universe it's imperative that we become agents of harmony building which would necessarily require what J Krishnamurti refers to as "inward revolution." "Know thyself" is a profound Vedic proclamation. Rumi, the 13th-century Sufi saint from Persia, also concurred:

There's a life force
within your soul, seek that life.
There is a gem in the mountain
Of your body, seek that mine.
O traveller, if you are in search
Of that, don't look outside,
Look inside yourself
And seek that.

The poet conjures up a poetic persona in the form of a sailor who is journeying on this earth to learn the necessary lessons to discover his greater reality and deeper truth and is thus directed towards liberation and Mukti.

Is the sailor aware
Whose body he's carrying himself?
A journey
A struggle for enlightenment
After probing lifelong into oneself
Alone
Very very alone
It's indeed -all along. (p.44)

Among contemporary poets, Manas Bakshi's "meditative poetry" promises to offer a great deal of hope and spiritual strength to the devout and those striving to comprehend life's

perplexing riddles. The poet sings “the hymn of life” as he gradually reaches his inner luminous centre and opens up his heart to encompass nature, mankind, universe, and everything worth knowing. It is the “bliss of solitude” and the “power of consciousness” that enable him to hear the “soul music” inspiring a new perspective on everything, every moment that flavours and beautifies existence itself, and that drives him to ring in melodies affirming the glory of eternity. The poet's spiritual compass is broader, and his soliloquy is exceedingly loud; as a result, he attracts a billion people to his sojourn, many of whom appear to be pursued by “chiaroscuro-wilderness.” 71 (Bakshi). Manas Bakshi's poetry is an ethereal blend of the earthly and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite, and it embodies a subtle charm. It simplifies the most perplexing conundrum, the most bewildering timeless mystery, and attends to the ultimate truth, separating substance from illusion in the same way that grain is separated from chaff. The poetry in this collection succinctly and lyrically preserves and disseminates the messages of Indian philosophy, scriptures, and mystic traditions. These poems exemplify his preparation for the present and the future. Many of the poems make specific enquiries into the perennial constants such as, death, God, salvation and the man's desire to experience the ultimate bliss- the final destination of life cycle. Bakshi's poetry reveals “haunting, archaic, and also euphoric questions” as it progresses through the four critical stages of poetic formation, namely recollection, contemplation, recrudescence, and composition. The poems in the collection are imbued with the mysterious confluence of inner/outer.

A reflected self-
No, not on water
But on whatever bubbling
Whatever glowing
With or without a spark of life.
Soliloquy of the sailor begins the way
A child plays with his broken toy
Finding nothing else at the moment
To grapple with and enjoy; (p.44)

As the poet goes on a journey from ignorance to self-awareness, the path is fraught with darkness, discomfort, and peril, yet readers can find strength in his companionship on this 'journey within' and discover their own meanings. The poems of his recent collection are characterized by tranquillity and serenity: After all, the origin of true poetry lies in “emotions recollected in tranquillity. (Wordsworth)” Nonetheless, the poet is cognizant of culture, religious legacies, tradition, and the grand scheme of cosmos, while he pursues his creative impulses. His poetry is a response to the cosmic summons, and he urges us to assist him in facilitating our connection with the divine energies, in order to unearth and experience the purest joy and bliss within. It is the flowing water, the blowing air, the lovely sunshine, and the calming moonbeam that enable the worn-out self to continue the spiritual voyage he has set out to pursue, “this mystic journey/Into an unknown realm-May it be resonant with/ Cosmic rhythm. (Bakshi, 46)” For him, it is a gradual awakening of the soul and it has to be the same for us and thus, he assists readers in preparation for the state of consciousness where the individual self is at peace with and in perfect symphony with the universe. With each step the poet takes further and further out into the ever-expanding depths of the universe, he becomes increasingly aware of his own loneliness, which causes him to scream out in agony:

Alone
I can't help crying for
what's lost in the dark of the night:
A prelude to next dawn;

What's crumbled into ashes
 Giving way to a hidden spark
 And what's preserved well all along
 Are lost again
 In the darkness of a secret well
 In an unknown moment.(p.47)

With the consciousness of the self in the tradition of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishada* where Sage Yagyawalkya explicates the truth of life: *Idam brahma, idamkshatram, imelokah, imedevah, imanibhutani, idamsarvam yad ayamatma*. "This Source of knowledge; this source of power; all these worlds; all these Gods; all these beings– All this is just the Self." (Swami-Krishnananda), the poet emphasizes the four-fold goals of human existence i.e., the attainment of four-fold pursuits, Purusharthas or the human goals -Dharma, Artha Kama And Moksha. Not undermining the importance of any, the human existence has to give equal importance to each one of these as they emancipate one from the three debts -Dev rna, Rishi Rna and PitraRna. Poetry assists in the attainment of the four-fold objectives as has been mentioned by Acharya Mammata in Kavyaprakash:

काव्यं यशसे अर्थकृते व्यवहारविदे शिवेतरक्षतये।
 सद्यः परनिर्वृतये कान्तासम्मिततयोपदेशयुजे॥

Mammata identified six immediate benefits of literature. The first is establishing one's name and reputation. The second is monetary and material gain. Third advantage is comprehending the world and adapting to its ways (Vyavahara Jnana). Fourthly, by using the information learned through Literature, one might evade the negative consequences of life. Fifth is to derive instant satisfaction from reading or considering it. Sixth is to get appropriate guidance, comparable to that imparted by a devoted wife. Indeed, great poetry serves several functions and engages the reader in a meditative journey that assists them in discovering the ultimate meaning of their existence. The purging of human desires, ability to see through the multiplicity of relationships, to think beyond the constraints of time and petty trivialities and to be able to see the essential oneness of being by liberating 'self' from the narrow considerations and yearnings to remain in a state of perpetual bliss are some of dominant themes of this anthology. The seer poet traverses the distance between the mundane and the spiritual life and exhorts others to understand the importance of true blessedness. The journey of the poet is similar to a Sufi's journey, or a mystic's journey who while living in this world loosens his worldly ties and keeps meditating about the unification of soul and God. He has conquered all his emotions, doubts and has asserted his faith in the Omniscient divine. The poet is not bothered by external conditions. His realization of the oneness with all liberates him, empowers him. His poetry helps us see through the mirage of life by attaining a stability of mind and coherence in ideas. Human existence, as it is immersed in false hopes, dreams and aims continue to shock and baffle us on close encounters but the poetry of Bakshi is like a light at the end of the tunnel and helps us see what is false and unreal from what is true and real. In the tradition of Upanishads, he emphasizes that it is the Atman or the self that is to be beheld, it is the atman that is to be heard about, it is the atman that is to be reflected upon and it is the atman which is to be contemplated upon.

"Atmava are drastavyahsrotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyo: (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (7)- Madhu Kanda, Chapter II)

Indeed, it is by the way of the discussion, listening and contemplation of the 'self' that

everything is known. The relationship between a boat and a sailor is intrinsic to the anthology and the poet extends and applies this analogy to explain the body and soul relationship in way easier as the soul moves and directs the body as a sailor does a ship. Plato, too explicated the relationship as that between a ship and a pilot. In “Earthly Moorings Cast Off” Bakshi describes the beginning of a soul's journey to discover the secrets of the universe and its connectedness with the inner being. Notwithstanding the ebb and flow of the “life-river flowing,” the sailor characterizes himself as a boat carrying several items that he has carried for a long period of time and is now embarking on a trip to an unknown zone.

The sailor starts speaking
To his inner self:
A boat
This embodiment,
A sailor
Oneself sans name or address-
A boat carrying so long
Only a self,
A self
Shattered most or unfulfilled to the core
Untied forever,
Now set off for a voyage to an unknown zone. (p.12)

The poems in this collection are ruminations of a solitary self who has experienced the many stages of life and has grasped the essence of each one. The poet with all his spiritual powers connects well with flowers, plants, trees, water bodies and derives deeper lessons in humanity from the natural world. Flowers, plants, trees, and water bodies are particularly enticing to the poet, who draws deeper truths about mankind from the natural world and interacts with them with all of his spiritual abilities. Nature, for the poet-prophet, is not only a magnificent spectacle but a living force endowed with “the undying power to yield.” His keen intellect is influenced by the beliefs of rebirth and reincarnation. As with the human world, the natural world experiences power and energy transfer in a number of ways, much like biofuels made from biomass are a renewable source of energy, and the poet is acutely aware of the critical importance of sustainable growth in averting climate change. The section “Earthly moorings Cast Off” ends on a characteristic note:

Keep in mind, O mankind
Floating along with water hyacinth
All that seems extinct
Are sometimes blessed with
The spark of life
Perceptible in
Conversion of energy
For an after-life role,
Energy's never destroyed
It survives as the undying soul. (p.17)

The poet's views are shaped by the ideas of death and eternity, impermanence and permanence, the brutal truth of human suffering, and the life of fulfilment found in inner peace, love, and global harmony. The sailor's path through life requires him to let go of all toxicity and divisive politics in order to realize the universal oneness of being. As a creature of light and love, an individual has the ability to experience the entire universe in all of its dimensions as part of his/her inheritance. With an expanded state of consciousness, he is able to appreciate life and all that it has to offer. The poet implores all humanity to submit fully to Allah, Krishna,

Jesus, Buddha, Nanak, or any other divine manifestation, and to pray for universal brotherhood. He urges them to enlighten themselves to the 'Onkar,' the one-of-a-kind supreme entity that rules over the cosmic organism. The same resonant melody that vibrates the cosmic sphere is used across religions and cultures, whether it be a song or a prayer. This thought is convincingly put in the following lines:

Pray for universal brotherhood –
 Whatever be the region
 Culture or religion,
 At the core of heart
 The same tune resonant
 As vibrates the cosmic sphere,
 Be it a hymn
 To Allah, Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Nanak
 Or other divine incarnate
 Pray with total submission,
 Feel the Onkar
 Emanating from within-
 The only one supreme being
 Reigns the cosmic organism (p. 49)

These lines echo the Rigvedic thought, “Ekam sat VipraBahudhaVadanti”, which is translated as “Truth is one, the wise perceive it differently” or God is one, but the enlightened or the wise, address him by different names or perceive him differently. The poet elsewhere confirms “अहं ब्रह्मास्मीति” (Aha ॥ Brahmāsmīti). The elucidation of the Sanskrit aphorism– “I am Brahma” or “I am the Infinite Reality” brings out the unification of the microcosm and the macrocosm and thus brings one closer to the inner and the universal self.

O sailor
 Pulling on and on the oar
 To reach the shore
 Forget not your origin:
 The formless, limitless, divine infinite..
 The shore's definite
 One day we all reach,
 Not what's there across the shore
 Where we're supposed to be one
 With the only One: Brahman-
 The cycle of birth and death
 Unresolved forever remains. (p.74)

The poems are characterized by philosophic calm and serenity of thoughts much in a Keatsian sense. The poet's astute observation and understanding of worldly affairs prompts him to seek salvation through renunciation of worldly ambitions and expectations. Both the poet's thinking process and his writings are shaped by his conception of the self, his sense of selfhood, and cosmic awareness. Numerous verses emphasize the profound loneliness that many millennials are experiencing due to the 'myriad demands of life' or even exigencies arising out of what Bakshi calls 'modern urban syndrome.' The sailor who has overcome the unsurmountable challenges over the course of his journey has quite figuratively grasped the world's complexities with anxiety and determination and, as a result, feels more in control of his life. Numerous candid self-reflexive verses throughout the anthology emphasize the contrast between the states of “being” and “becoming.” The idea of a fragmented 'self' is constantly evaluated in relation with the concepts of a 'unified whole' and 'organic coherence' of the sums. The concepts of memory, meditation, reflection, and change and time are all

extensively discussed. The poet describes the maze of life 'the labyrinth of Karma' in a detached, dispassionate way. He has braved the storm and the stress of society and has no selfish desires. His mind is occupied by the thoughts of good of everyone and his position can best be understood as Gita's Sthitprajna or Sthitadhi.

To the poet, the whole world is like a vast expanse of unknown fathomless sea that engulfs a being. Thrilling and romantic, the sight fills one heart with joy and splendour. The anthology is as much about his spiritual evolution as about his communion with the greater reality. It is true that the greatest knowledge in this world is self-knowledge and the 'self' can never be thought of as an exclusive entity separable from internal and external. It is rather finding one's way through the myriad forces of the cosmos and striking connect with the superior being. As Sri Aurobindo in his *Life divine* observes:

“Spirituality in its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul, which is other than our mind, life and body, an inner inspiration to know, to feel, to be that, to enter into contact with greater Reality beyond and pervading the universe which inhabits also our own being, to be in communion with it, and a turning, a conversion, a transformation of our whole being as a result of the aspiration, the contact, the union, a growth or waking into a new becoming or new being, a new self, a new nature. (Life Divine, (Vol. 19)”

Water, water, water
Blue deep blue, sky blue
Colour doesn't matter
What matters
Is depth
Unknown, fathomless
From the shore
Feel it's beckoning. (p.9)

The one idea that the poet has taken from Buddha, Vivekanand and other spiritual thinkers is the spiritual oneness of the whole universe. He has found his spiritual harbour in diverse traditions of thought: mysticism, Vedantic philosophy, Buddhism and many others. He quotes from Vedic philosophy to substantiate his own reasoning. An individual being is but a manifestation of the same divine force that permeates all. “The Shapeless divine” poignantly captures this acknowledgment to or affiliation with the universe:

“I'm nobody.
All is he-The Almighty.
He in me an individual entity.
Detached- I'm nobody till lost in him
“Soham'-I'm He
An iota of the divine, shapeless infinite.”(p.64)

It's with such dexterity that he makes use of language and renders it a quality making it familiar yet soothing to the ears. In a classic sense, art imitates life and also has the propensity to reinvigorate it, give direction to it and it is in this sense that we read the poems of this anthology to find a new direction in life. Bakshi looks back at his experiences not with a critical look but with a view to make sense of all of his worldly experiences to help him prepare a spiritual ground for an unbiased, secure grounding. It's a typical Kabir thought, “Tera Sai Tujh Mein” and the eternal puzzle “Mokokahandhoondhe re bande” (Your Lord is inside you; the truth is within you) that echoes time and again in our ears when we come across following lines:

The entire world
A correctional home,

Purify yourself
 To know the eternal soul:
 The seed is in you
 Water it to sprout,
 The spark is in you
 Ignite it to blow up
 The darkness of mind...(p. 38)

The mystery of human existence is that all that appears to be true has no intrinsic value and that which is important seem to be obliterated and forgotten by us who seem to be languorous in our worldly affairs. And it is precisely this thought that worries the poet the most:

Human beings
 Humble or boastful of their look,
 Amiable or snobbish
 In attitude
 Seldom ponder over the day
 When it all will end
 With nothing to convey.(p. 57)

The journey through this sordid world seems to be fascinating yet all-consuming. It is exhaustive like all physical journeys and the allure of the shoreline seems to be teeming with thrill and is simply ineluctable. Although one may like flirting with the sea's waves, one is constantly apprehensive about the unforeseen sequences of events that might occur owing to the sea's dark and unfathomable character. Working his way through life's challenges and traumas, there is an attempt to regain a sense of confidence to cope with our realities. Self-awareness is critical for discovering the actual purpose of our lives and existence. This desire to understand oneself is extremely empowering:

Come and join
 When there's a call-
 The four walls
 Limiting your freedom,
 The ceiling above
 Marking the upper limit
 Of a closed-door vision (p.10)

There is a pressing need for such a revitalization. In Vedanta, this is referred to as Viveka, or discrimination in order to distinguish between right and wrong. We will have to know the test of truth in every instant of our existence and in each of our deeds, which is purity, oneness. The scriptures unanimously affirm its importance for the redemption of the weary and battered spirit.

Go and see
 What's there...
 What's there beyond
 The eternal riddle-
 Between a beginning
 And an end Between a verdant pasture
 And a plot of land -arid, abandoned
 A spectrum if any at all
 Across all that seems
 Common and known. (p.10)

There's a strong yearning in him to be cleansed of all the selfish emotions and to be purged of all the sins. This anthology offers a spiritual retreat to those tired of worldly

experiences. As one shuts one's mind off from the din and chaos of the worldly clamour, one can experience a spiritual renewal. It's solitude that prepares one for such an unworldly experience as has been explained elsewhere: "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." (Psalm 23: 2-3) Radhanath Swami says, "The Vedic solution to unhappiness is to learn to give, love, and be satisfied with the simple things that truly matter in life." The poet is intrigued by "the still sad music of humanity (Wordsworth)" and quickly understands that the only way to realize the essence of life is through love for other creatures.

To win over
The numbness of mind
And spur of instinct
Why not verify all relationships
On the touchstone of true love,
God like giving
Mother like caring
Earth like enduring?(p.26)

In a typical sense of "what you seek is seeking you," (Rumi) Manas Bakshi too proclaims: The sailor has chosen not to remain a captive/prisoner of his senses; he is seeking to liberate himself from the different trappings that have been placed around him, and Rousseau echoed this yearning for freedom when he declared: "Alas, man is born free but he is everywhere in chains!" From his experience with solitude, the poet encourages others to enjoy solitude rather than sordid company. At times, he resembles Byronic hero, who, in his search for solitude and serenity, prefers natural forces rather than humans. Not a man hater or misanthropist, but an ascetic and sage who finds profound satisfaction in solitude since it brings him closer to the universe, the poet echoes Byron's ideas:

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar (Byron)

Manas Bakshi believes that experiencing solitude can lead to human empowerment if people link themselves with the powers of the cosmos and comprehend their place in the big scheme of things, which he believes is possible. Loneliness, after all, is a necessary condition for self-knowledge, as you become 'anasakt' and detached. Vedanta, too, emphasizes the need of abandoning the apparent false illusory world. Only by renouncing the evil ridden world would one be able to experience bliss. Through renunciation, enjoyment is attainable. In this state of being, there is nothing to cling to as you disassociate yourself from the clutter of negative energies or the higher forces make it possible for you to see the beauty and the power coming out of lonely existence. The poet emphasizes that the solitude can unify all dimensions of one's existence. To understand, and reconnect with one's existential core, one needs to enter into the silence zone and solitude to become one with the primal self. This solitude or voluntary detachment or self-acquired loneliness must be viewed as a strength or a condition of being that allows greater harmony and equilibrium in life. While the external world expends our energies, the internal life or the workings of the mind and soul worked out through meditation and yogic practices let us reach our inner silent centre which is repository of strength. This inner silence or solitude is not to be confused with loneliness. It's not a deplorable state. It is a condition that awakens you to your potential and also allows you to live your life from a more exalted vision of your real self. Silent enquiry or probing creates a one-of-a-kind soliloquy that evokes insights into our inner selves. The poet elucidates the merits of solitude and how it may help us gain a good perspective on events in life.

Loneliness of the prisoner under trial
 Behind the gaol,
 Loneliness of the tree
 With skeletal branches
 Unlovely to shelter birds anymore,
 Loneliness of the nocturnal bird
 Alone in flight,
 Loneliness of the star
 Glimmering alone at night
 No blood drop
 Still it bleeds,
 No tear drop
 Still it weeps
 Human mind
 That's too alone
 To see its longings unfulfilled
 Transformed into lonesome soliloquy. (p. 46)

The poet, as a brooding or moping figure, engages in a lonesome soliloquy; yet, this is to be appreciated, since this is not the scream of an individual pitted against oppressive forces of society, but the cry of a soul going on a mystic journey into an unfathomable world. Contrary to popular assumption, these solitary voyages, albeit arduous, have the propensity to bring about immense joy or rapture despite the harrowing feelings that follow, which are equivalent to those experienced while traversing all terrestrial trails. As a bold seafarer, the sailor overcomes all obstacles posed by the daunting and unfathomable sea and other forces and ultimately reaches the shore, where the tranquil repose beckons him to put his anxious nerves to rest. To the flustered and ignorant masses, the present anthology offers a hope that they can work for their own salvation through self-knowledge. In very clear terms the poet explains how one can connect with one's 'inner silent centre' (Dr. Pushpa Nagrani). But this is not a cry of a distressed soul in vain as Shelley's persona says in "The Indian Serenade": "I die! I faint! I fail!" It is the lamentation of a soul trapped in vagaries of existence and striving to reconnect with one's existential essence.

It's a life-long search
 From within
 For the soul that reigns
 Beyond the biological level
 Beyond all hedonic instincts,
 "Atman"- the soul
 In perfect symphony with
 All we can see
 And all we can't,
 All we can feel
 And all we can't,
 An inter-related continuity
 In cosmic order
 Enfolding life all along
 To make it finally free
 The way one day thy very boat
 Cast off its moorings. (p.74)

These lines remind one of the greatest truth about the supreme self as expressed in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* AtmaVa Are Drashtavyah Srotavyo Mantavyo Nididhyasitavyah (Only the self should be seen, heard, reflected on and meditated upon.) Mr. Manas Bakshi is a poet of greater spiritual force and consciousness and his poetry traverses several planes-

realistic, mystical, mythical and aesthetic. His poetry is mantric and metaphysical as Dante's or Aurobindo's and effortlessly transports one to higher levels of consciousness. Just like Vedic hymns or T.S Eliot's *Four Quartets* it caters to the needs of the mind, body and soul. This is the same knowledge that is enshrined in the great Upanishads and other scriptures, and it is this knowledge that forms the crux of Indian philosophy – the infinite oneness of the soul that manifests itself in you, me, and all of us – and that we can all work for our own salvation. As Vedas decree that with the faith in ourselves and faith in the supreme being are the secret of all happiness. In the spirit of Upanishadic proclamation उत्तिष्ठताग्रतप्राप्यवरान्निबोधत (Kathopanishad, Chapter 1)-utti ||hatajāgrataprāpyavarānnibodhata|Arise, awake and Stop not till the goal is reached (transliteration by Swami Vivekanand), Manas Bakshi, too exhorts human beings to wake up from the self-induced slumber and attain the highest knowledge. It is the expansion of the self and the improvement of the human mind that occupies central concern in his poetic reflections.

This collection is a must-read for all those interested in the intersectional deliberations on spirituality, mysticism, human rights, ecology and questions of morality. Just as the poet divulges truths that foster spiritual growth and integration, he places his hope and confidence in future generations' wisdom to save society from withering and deteriorating further. He has called into question the injustices, inequities, and issues that individuals face in contemporary society via his poetic delineations. His poetry resonates with all of us with its unorthodox, unbiased, and secular approach. Religious vocabulary, myths, symbols, and metaphors are all used in a distinctive and emphatic manner. The poet is particularly devoted to the evaluation and reorganization of human subjectivity, since it offers the possibility to achieve the pinnacle of human endeavor. All that we need is the “stream of love” to ward off communal outrage as the stream of life craves for a “rhythmic effluence.” If the goal of art is to restore order and beauty in the midst of deteriorating and corrupt life values, the poetry of Manas Bakshi accomplishes this goal admirably. Bakshi attempts to do this in his new collection *Soliloquy of a Sailor*. There appears to be a cultural crisis affecting the entire world at the moment, and efforts to restore humanism and the meaning of human life seem to be futile. Humanity appears to have been estranged from its theological, philosophical and cultural roots, and it is at this point that Bakshi's poetry appears to be a clear stream of reason, as it effortlessly unifies all of the key elements of human existence: the self, the milieu, and the cosmos. This kind of poetry speaks through the din and chaos of human blabber and nightmarish existence. One striking point of this poetry is that it doesn't entrap readers into preconceived thoughts or dominant ideologies, but rather frees human spirit from the habits of submission and undue reverence for the unjust forces. The sailor emerges as the quintessential human character who, after much soul-searching and introspection, decides to change the course of his destiny. The anthology encapsulates the idea of existential journey quite effectively. Literature often includes characters who are set on a journey of self-discovery e.g. Tennessee Williams' Tom Wingfield, Dante's protagonist, Sophocles' Odysseus, Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews, Mark Twain's Huck Finn, Herman Melville's Ishmael and so on and so forth. Initiating the soul's journey towards the divine, while rejecting maya, mithya, and moh, Manas Bakshi's poetry seems to be falling in the trajectory of religious poetry in the sense that it talks directly to our soul and restores our confidence in the soul as the absolute principle, source of all knowledge and bliss.

These life affirming verses by Manas Bakshi teach us how to live life heroically. With his extensive understanding of Indian philosophy, mysticism, mythological and aesthetic

traditions, the poet makes a sincere endeavour to help the uninitiated perceive and grasp the cosmic secrets. Although the poems in this collection are autobiographical and stem from the poet's epiphanies, they make no attempt to impose a theological agenda; rather, they succeed in conveying the poet's thoughts with uncommon precision and objectivity. As we get immersed in this inevitable quest or expedition for the 'eternal truth,' the poet's thoughts reaffirm the believer's faith:

Isn't it all slated for
 An enwrapping, brimful beatitude
 Beyond human prediction or guess?
 His munificence, His greatness
 Still enigmatic in
 Man's eternal quest... (p.65)

This work will undoubtedly be remembered for its suggestiveness, for its deeper motivations to help us comprehend the cosmic beckoning that each of us experience at some point in our lives, as well as for the authentic, humanistic voices that it features. In times of colossal distress and disintegration, the poet, as the most luminous exponent of philosophical thought, directs us towards a pattern of belief that we may follow for our spiritual rejuvenation.

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