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Spiritual Quest in Vijay Kumar Roy's *Realm of Beauty and Truth: A Collection of Poems*

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Abstract

Vijay Kumar Roy is a university teacher by profession and a bi-lingual poet, editor and critic. He started writing poems at the age of nineteen. He has authored and edited more than one dozen books on English poetry, Hindi poetry, Indian English poetry, Indian English fiction, Peace Literature, Comparative Literature, and English Language Teaching.

Dr. Roy is a man of principle. He has deep faith in the Almighty. He is fascinated by two things in life: beauty and truth. To him beauty does not mean external beauty. He believes in the inner beauty of man which helps him to find the truth. For him, beauty is synonymous with truth. The poet has a tender heart to find the presence of Almighty in all creatures as well as in nature. His collection of poems, *Realm of Beauty and Truth*, published in 2016 contains poems dealing with his love for humanity, search for truth and quest for spirituality. The present paper aims at dealing with his spiritual quest in this collection of poems.

Keywords: Beauty, Truth, Spirituality, *Tapasya* (penance), Divinity, Nature, *Yogi*.

India is a country with rich tradition and heritage. People following different faiths are able to live here peacefully. All religions believe the existence of the Supreme Being which is omnipotent. The world we live in is 'Maya' and our life, here, is transient. We are sent here to perform certain responsibilities without expecting the fruit of our work. Unfortunately, we lose ourselves in this mundane world and forget the divine commands. It is essential to feel the presence of immortality around us.

In the postmodern period, man has become highly materialistic and chases money, power and happiness at the cost of peace. He is not aware of the impermanence of this life and the need to surrender himself at the feet of God. He runs after success and achievement without principles. But Vijay Kumar Roy, like a sadhu, says, life is an

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'eternal game'. He longs to know about the mystery of life. His knowledge about great epics and World's Classics has made him to look at the world like the spiritual masters. He expresses his fascination to know the secret of our life which the ancient Indian ascetics could experience after hundreds of years of '*tapasya'* (penance).

> To enter and behold the One
> Whose arms are open
> And lap invites
> To sit and drink
> The milk of all mystery
> That ancient Indian ascetics
> Experienced after hundreds of years of *tapasya* (penance)!
> ("Learning" 9-15)

To the poet, education is a mission. It should widen our perception and broaden our knowledge. By education, he does not mean the qualifications one needs in order to get an employment in a 'job market' but he talks about 'real' education which satisfies the 'hungry soul' on the path of truth and gives sublime lessons about life. Let me quote Wordsworth, who considers nature as a teacher in his poem, "The Tables Turned":

> One impulse from a vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> Than all the sages can. (21-24)

The purpose of education is 'self-realization'. V. K. Roy strongly believes that beauty is truth. Here I recall John Keats, who in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" writes, ""Beauty is truth, truth beauty," – that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." (49-50). Roy feels that all beautiful forms of nature bring us close to the Almighty where we attain self-realization. Lord Buddha, who attained *Nirvana* under Bodhi tree, also insists that self-realization is the first step for spirituality.

The poet feels the presence of God in living and non-living entities. He thinks that all creations of God are 'eternal educators'. The poet considers them as 'messengers of Eternity'. He aims at freeing himself from the bondage of birth and death and get eternal shelter in the Almighty. Like Swami Vivekananda, he asks us to work with 'detachment'. He is confident that this will bring us eternal seat near 'His splendid throne'. We find this note in his poem "A Pious Pursuit":

> That kingdom of Delight
> Entails our surrender
> To His lotus feet
> Without attaching to our acts (11-14)

Vijay Kumar Roy's ability to see God in everything and feel His presence makes me recall some lines of Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" in which he expresses the presence of the Almighty in every aspect of nature:

…. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. … (94-103)

There is another poem entitled "The Love for Mortals Leads to the Immortal" in *Realm of Beauty and Truth* that echoes the same feeling of divine presence:

There is divine presence in all
So they descend on earth and call
To preserve a seat in His lap
And enjoy the eternal sap. (13-16)

The poet strongly believes that admiration of beauty in all creation of nature will help him to find out the truth about life and eternal bliss.

Without suggesting any philosophy, simply Vijay Kumar Roy questions the purpose of our life in his poem "Goal". The pain, he expresses here, is similar to the one expressed about the loss of religious faith by T. S. Eliot in his "Waste Land". Faith in Almighty creates a kind of moral fear in man. This prevents one from committing sins. Morality and humanity are sacrificed to achieve power and prosperity in the modern age. Religion and honesty are synonymous with each other, but today they have different meanings. Religion is not taken seriously. Pilgrimages are taken as vacation tours. Without destination, man's journey of life continues. The poet feels that most of us live without any direction.

All are busy in this race,
Moving, moving and moving,
No direction, no end…….. ("Goal" 23-25)

It is apt to quote Matthew Arnold's lines from "Dover Beach" in which Arnold portrays spiritually impoverished world in the following manner:

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. (35-37)

In Hinduism, God is seen as Trinity – Creator (Brahma), Protector (Vishnu) and Destroyer (Shiva). Even in Christianity God has three forms – Father, son and the Holy Ghost. To make the easy understanding of twenty first century man, Roy talks about God –Generator, Operator and Destroyer. Advaita Vedanta says that all individuals are Jiva Atmas and they are the projection of Brahman, the Paramatma. In this context, Jayaram V writes:

> Atman, the individual self, has no separate existence of its own. It is but a projection or reflection of Brahman only in each being. A jiva is deluded soul by egoism, desires, and other impurities and thereby experiences duality and separation. Because of it each being is bound to the cycle of births and deaths and the laws of karma as long and remains so until liberation is achieved. (http://www.hinduwebsite.com)

Roy's poems also reflect the same point where individual self merges with universal self in "A Truth":

> Entire things in the Universe
> ……..
> They're controlled by One
> Supreme Spirit, the Lord
> ……..
> Human being is His model
> Modus operandi, modus vivendi
> Being separate, but living with ease. ("A Truth" 1-9)

Like a 'yogi' Vijay Kumar Roy treats life and death alike. He writes, "Life teaches lessons sublime …/ Death relieves from tiredness of life." ("Life and Death" 3-6) To him, death is bliss. Death is the ultimate reality of life. The *Ramayana* and the *Gita* have tried to impart similar lessons. Thomas Hardy writes that man is puppet in the hands of fate. Even nature reminds us of the certainty of death by earthquake, flood, Tsunami and Phailin. Roy thinks that certainty of death makes one know about the mystery of life. Here one can recall Shakespeare's poem, "The Seven Ages":

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances, (1-3)

Unfortunately man fails to realize the impermanence of life. Scientific advancement fails to procure the life of man. Vijay Kumar Roy, a humanist, feels that the mushrooming vices have weakened the soul of humanity. Science and technology develops a cut-throat competition and converts man into a dehumanized creature instead of promoting humanism. Dishonesty, loss of principles and degeneration of values have become inevitable elements in the way of living. Einstein, a great scientist, also talks about the importance of religious faith. Faith in God forces us to keep up the good values. Einstein, in "Science, Philosophy and Religion: A Symposium" states, "I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without that profound faith. The situation may be expressed by an image: science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind." (Einstein 46)

Vijay Kumar Roy believes in the spiritual aspect of love, therefore, his "Devotion to God and love-lorn passion", both go together. He believes that God has sent the lover/lady love as a substitute for divine presence. To love is not a sin but it is 'a divine act'. Lovers are the messengers of God. In the Tamil language, we say 'Anbe Sivam' (Love is God). No doubt, Roy has got his inspiration from William Shakespeare,

William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, John Keats, W. B. Yeats and some other writers, but most importantly from his reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* since childhood, and some other sacred texts. He glorifies love and beauty in these words:

> To love is a divine act,
> A rare gift to rare beings.
> Instead of our Master would come
> He sends His envoys on earth
> To spread His abstruse vision:
> There's no such deed
> As a deed of love, the sublime. ("Lovers are not fools" 4-10)

In another poem, he writes that it is love that helps one to find real beauty and it is a love for beauty that leads one to a path following which one can attain all knowledge that a human being is capable of. It is pertinent to quote some lines of his poem:

> The force of love is the mightiest
> And most ethereal
> Among all prime forces
> Within one's ken.
> Its perennial effect sank me in a sea
> Alluring to lead me to the path of a savant.
> I enjoyed all elements in its core –
> Kiss, caress, and embrace much more
> Learning a lesson of beauty, the dearest
> And found a sweet pearl, the rarest. ("Fruit of Love" 1-10)

To the poet, his lady love is a great gift. He plans to leave this mortal world with his lady love. His aim is to go to a place where no mortal can scold him and also to his lady love. He is confident that lovers will be called 'love's deities' and can bless all devotees. In the male chauvinist society, it is a surprise that a man considers his wife, who is the embodiment of personal, social, moral and professional values, as a source of great bliss. The poet has elevated the woman to the status of Goddess. He is able to find the earthly paradise in the love of his wife. Comparing his wife with Savitri, Sita, Urmila, Vidyottama and Radha shows not only his knowledge about the Indian epics and *Puranas* but also his maturity and amiability to treat the opposite sex with dignity. The poet writes:

> With spirit of Savitri
> Devotion of Sita
> Sacrifice of Urmila and
> Learning of Vidyottama
> She enlightens me
> With her innovative wisdom.
> An embodiment of Radha
> Who had no enmity with Gopis,
> She is an absolute example
> Of a modern woman. ("Eternal Bliss" 1-10)

In fusing earthly love with divine love, Dr. Roy's feelings resemble that of John Donne. He seeks peace and bliss in life. He wants to reach the absolute truth through the means of love and humanity. His heart grieves at seeing the educational institutions, the temples of learning, functioning like an industry, where degrees and diplomas are sold and they become business centres where black money is converted into white. He labels such institutions as 'dreamy factories' that manufacture 'inhuman products'. As a man with conscience, Dr. Roy feels wounded by the destruction of nature in the name of development and modernization.

> The innocent foothills along with trees
> Wounded by machines and mortals
> Pave serpentine ways
> And lament the development at the cost of environment.
> ("In the Lap of My Mother" 9-12)

As a seeker of truth, Dr. Roy feels the presence of invisible in the sound. In Hinduism, the sound "Om" resonates with God. His imaginary conversation with Almighty in the poem "My Guide" reveals that God is the only reality in this world:

> "Be not a slave to worldliness
> Get rid of such illusive mesh
> Here none is yours, except Me"
> .....
> He paved the way to beatitude
> For me, indeed He is my all. ("My Guide" 10-12, 15-16)

In this context it is also apt to quote Aju Mukhopadhyay's observation on Roy's poetry:

> ……He adores the path of *sanyasis* (ascetics) after hearing the ultimate sound that the whole world is a Maya and that no one truly belongs to him, that all the worldly love and affections are real illusions. The age old Indian other-worldly belief leads him to mentally realize that God is the only truth and one should follow Him only, leaving the illusive world of sorrow and death. (Mukhopadhyay 203)

Dr. Roy prefers to live in harmony with nature. He treats nature as his mother as we see in his poem "In the Lap of My Mother". As an honest man, he couldn't digest dishonest ways practiced in the society. In his research paper entitled "Alluring Visitations: The Poetry of Vijay Kumar Roy", Dr. Santosh Kumar Padhy writes about the poet that, "Although he is greatly impressed by Baconian pragmatism and Keatsian search for joy and beauty, his mastery over word playing is one of the greatest achievements in the arena of his much- hyped experience and poetic manifestations that ponder over the mystic creation of God and His grace to be prayed as the rarest of the rare gifts to rescue the self and the soul forever." (Padhy 209)

There is relentless quest for spirituality in Dr. Roy's poems. He believes that the search and admiration for beauty in living and non-living things in this universe will result in the realization of the absolute truth that is the Divine Spirit. In his 'Epilogue'

of the book, the poet writes, "…confluence of Truth (sat), Intellect (chit) and Delight (aanand)–Sachchidaanand – gives us ecstasy of delight (Parmaanand)" (*Realm of Beauty and Truth* 83). His insistence upon love means the love for humanity, and his obsession with beauty implies his large heartedness to seek beauty in all creatures and nature. Love allows one to find only the good thing in others and that good thing is known as truth. Truth is absolute. It is the Divine Spirit. It helps human soul to merge with Divine. Merging of one's soul with Divine liberates one from the cycle of birth and death, and gives eternal bliss. Roy's poems are replete with this spiritual view of life in a simple manner but with effective words that really deserves applause.

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