Vijay Kumar Roy. *Realm of Beauty and Truth: A Collection of Poems*. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2016. PB, pp. 86. Price: ₹ 250 / $12. ISBN: 978-93-5207-250-7.

Reviewed by
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Vijay Kumar Roy teaches English at Northern Border University, Arar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He is editor-in-chief of *Ars Artium* (www.arsartium.org), a research journal of humanities and social sciences published from New Delhi. The rationale of Roy's collection of poems, we're told on the back cover is that *Realm of Beauty and Truth* is a collection that covers the themes of beauty, truth, love, spirituality, patriotism, peace and universal brotherhood.

A characteristic of Roy's poem is the presence of inherence, concision and not a little weight: this excerpt is from "In the lap of My Mother":

> Wandering amid hills and forests
> I'm captured by Her beatific smiles
> Ever gaze creates an Elysium
> And rouses the powers of penance of Vishwamitra.

This poem, with its very sentimentality, exemplifies all Roy's strengths. The control of lines, the references to deities are exemplary. The line rarely falters, always carries with it a sort of ease; it understands the importance of elegance but never strives too obviously to achieve it. The lines are often perfectly attuned to the subject matter, as we see in "A Pius Pursuit":

> The blowing of winds, trembling of leaves,
> Waves of water, chirping of birds,
> Movements of innocent babes and beasts,
> Beauty of flowers and moonlit nights, and
> Existence of the living and non-living entities

Here, the longer opening lines give us the movement of wind, leaves, water, birds, babes and beasts.

The single stanza of "Loss or Gain" inducts us into its own deeply intriguing and atmospheric reality. Roy is ambitious in his acclamations:

> Honesty weeps bitterly
> Morality repents for its fate
> Spirituality hides in a corner
> Virtue has lost its power

However, he is unshowy; has a high intelligence but avoids ostentation.

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In "The Greatest Jewel", Roy gives us an insight into what he thinks is "a jewel of great price" – "Shyness". Roy's insights are as innovative as his use of language. Maybe the subjects he writes about demand a more flexible language because many of the poems consider identity and instead of finding something fixed and certain, they find shifting ground. In "Life and Death", for example, he writes, "Let me praise death – the dearest / To meet life after knowing all mystery."

The long poem "A Fortunate Father" ends with the following lines,

> … there is no vainness
> In worshipping Me
> …, being once Mine,
> Is Mine forever."

There is a degree of order in the poems, a separating of one thought from another, a visual and syntactical more that signals a change in thought. This allows us to see how Roy occupies a threshold between different ideas: order and chaos, sorrow and joy, sensuality and spirituality. Several of the poems are of a spiritual nature. In "Eternal Bliss", for example, in this beautiful poem of love, he writes,

> With spirit of Savitri
> Devotion of Sita
> Sacrifice of Urmila and
> Learning of Vidyottama
> She enlightens me
> With her innovative wisdom.

A rather affecting love poem, "Fruit of Love" with its reference to "the force of love", begins with these lines:

> The force of love is the mightiest
> And most ethereal
> Among all the prime forces
> Within one's ken.

There is a deep personal intensity behind the poem: the poet discovers "a pearl of great price" – a gift, which can only be found in the sea. "Morning Sighs" describes what it was like to the young and to hide one's passions, but now "Devotion to God and love-lorn passion" receives all his attention.

The first two stanzas of "Poor But of True Heart" describe a beautiful person, before whom the poet appears to be ashamed, but the last stanza offers the fact that not only God is not on his side, but nature too:

> Not only God is against me
> Nature too, seems the same
> But in spite of their ill-will
> My heart s love-worthy still.

There is a link between this poem and the rather unsettling "Dour Days". Here the poet describes a woman "Descending from the zigzag alleys of hills" with an

undernourished baby on her back. This episode, so frankly reported, reveals the poet's empathy with those less fortunate than himself.

One of the best of these poems is concerned with brutality, as in the poem of that name. The initial impulse from the author is to describe those people that history will not forget – Hitler, Mussolini, Alexander the Great, Baber and Aurangzeb – "for their over-ambitiousness / and the deeds of tyranny." In "Latent Agony of Major Indian Expatriates" the focus is on the intermingling of past and present, and eloquently it gives recognition to those who are forgotten by history – the natives. The poem explores the "Distinction in practices between them and the natives / Makes them realise immaturity in their changed faith". The impact of discrimination on life is poignantly reflected in ideas of history, nationhood, and the construction of identity.

"A Prayer for My Son" combines the recollection of the poet's son and the celebration of his growth with a wonderful sense of blessing on his life in the final verse:

> Let leading and managerial skills
> touch his feet and no judgement
> should hurt any heart
> instead be a solace to the destitute.

This awareness of the preciousness of life and of those who seek to destroy it is also suggested in the final poem, "Result of Gentleness", where the speaker observes that

> Our values should not be allowed
> To make us forget great lessons of history
> And again come in the clutches of
> Horrendous designs of the awaiting tyrants.

These poems are a moving celebration of what endures, in the individual life and in the human and natural world at large. Vijay Kumar Roy's poetry turns to the power and sustenance of God, or the hear-work that art does, and relishes the difficulties and pleasures to be found in the world. This is a poet who knows the pain as well as the passion of life and transforms them into an understanding of what it is to be human.

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