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MYSTICISM AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF ROMENBASU



Dr. Dixit Sanjay Ganpat

Asso. Professor, Dept. of English, Mudhoji College, Phaltan.
Dist. Satara. (M.S.).

ABSTRACT

The present research paper attempts to study the spiritual and mystical elements in Roman Basu's poetry. The paper analyses the poems selected from his poetic collection, entitled 'The Whistle in The Wind'. Romen Basu is one of the most prolific authors in Indian English literature. He belongs to the tradition of Indian English romantic poets like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Henry Derozio and Sarojini Naidu. Mysticism and spirituality are the major aspects of romantic poetry. In his poetry, Basu gives expression to his spiritual and mystical ideas like romantic approach to life and death, man-God relationship, the idea of self-exploration, search for tranquility and serenity in life, and the idea of surrendering the self, etc.



KEYWORDS: Spirituality, Mysticism, Romantic poetry, Man-God relationship, Self-exploration etc.

INTRODUCTION

Romanticism emerged as a movement against the background of growing materialism of science and extreme rationalism of the Enlightenment. The movement marked a 'return to the experience of the mystical side of the ancient wisdom'. The romantic poets were disillusioned by new discoveries of Science and the rationalistic philosophy of the Enlightenment. For inspiration, they went back to the medieval legends, mythologies of the Western as well as the ways of thinking of the Oriental. The romantics celebrated the cosmic spirit which is both transcendental and immanent as the ground of all beings. They had a strong belief in the principle of the innate capacity of human mind to know and unite with the Divine through imagination and intuition. Thus, romantic poetry is characterized by its mystical and spiritual approach to human life and Nature. Many scholars and literary critics have tried to explain the mystic elements in British Romantic Poetry. The Indian English poetry also has this mystic strain especially in poets like Henry Derozio, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and some others.

Romen Basu (b.1923) is one of the most prolific authors in Indian English literature. As a creative writer he has handled the important literary genres like novel, short story and poetry. He has nine collections of poetry to his credit. Basu has written many poems that present the theme of mysticism, spirituality or the transcendental experience which the speaker had undergone. In Basu's *Whistle in the Wind* (2003), one finds many poems that present issues related to the metaphysical world. Basu's ideas are, no doubt, based on his personal experiences, his exposure to the larger international canvas, and the influences on him and his peculiar thinking process. In his interview, Basu has talked about the unexpected

deaths of his mother and sister that led him to distrust in God. While answering the question regarding his idea of the soul, he has said, "Soul is for me, abstract. It is so personal to me. I try to understand through soul searching... I want to understand the mystery of universe and what there is in the soul." Basu has agreed that he writes from the Indian metaphysical system of thinking. 'I search for answers within myself....My inner will tells me what it is.' All these views, no doubt, relate Basu to the Romantic tradition of poets in his ideas of mysticism and transcendentalism.

ROMANTIC APPROACH TO LIFE AND DEATH:

Romantic poetry generally celebrates life with its glory and grandeur. It presents life to be full of vitality, enthusiasm and activities. A Romantic poet's involvement in and attachment to life is innate and intimate. At the same time, he has also been occupied with the problem of death. In fact, he struggles with the idea of life and death and tries to solve the mysterious relationship between the two. In *Whistle in the Wind*, there are some poems like 'Hunter and the Hunted' and 'In Memory Town' in which Basu presents his ideas of life and death.

The poem 'Hunter and the Hunted' depicts existential angst on the speaker's part. It presents the drama of life and death. The poem depicts the universal principle 'the survival of the fittest'. In this world, everyone is a hunter and has been hunted by someone. The distance between life and death is very subtle and short. It is as short as a fraction of second. In this poem we are told about a fish that is happily and playfully wiggling in water. Suddenly a bird, called 'Queen of the Sky' dives into the water, picks up the fish and vanishes. The poem underlines the universal principle,

Futile for one fortunate for the other

They will live for the day

.....

Some live for others to surrender

Nature never failing its course. (2003-61)

In the interview, the Basu has emphasized his 'Indian roots and the Indian metaphysical system'. Obviously, there are many poems that exhibit some philosophical principles that are related to the mystery and meaning of human life. It is the Indian approach that asserts to neglect the body being perishable and pay attention to the soul being immortal. Such an approach advocates that physical pleasures do not give permanent joy.

'In Memory Town', Basu celebrates the Indian philosophy that one must learn to be contented with whatever one has in life. If one controls the wants in life, he experiences the state of happiness. It is the state of being 'sthitapradyna'. On the other hand, craving for more, ultimately leads to disappointment and sorrow. 'In Memory Town' explains such a pleasant journey of the speaker.

Open window restores

Uncluttered vision

Life is what it gives

Without asking. (2003-22)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND GOD:

Belief in some superhuman or supernatural power, say, like God is essentially a Romantic idea. The Romanists advocated the theory that the universe has been created by God. As per the Platonic theory God was the supreme Maker who created everything; the universe and the man. It is He who controls all the activities and lives in the universe.

RomenBasu, an Indian by birth and thinking and a Romantic by spirit must have certain ideas regarding the existence of God. Even though in his interview, he has denied any place to God in his life, the remark must be taken into account in proper context. It was a strong, passionate and immediate reaction of a child who had lost his mother and sister. Secondly, one's faith in God also includes some practices, beliefs and rituals that go in the name of God. There are some poems that depict the issue of the existence of God, the relationship between man and God and some religious conventions. Despite the belief in the existence of God, Romanticism also included the spirit of doubt, interrogation and revolt. The speaker does not deny

God but he enquires of some religious practices that might have lost meaning and relevance in the contemporary situations.

'All Sin at God', depicts the religious gospel that God the father, made man. It was His supreme creation. He wished that man would strive for the happiness of all. But, it didn't happen. Man turned selfish, self-seeker and a destroyer. He forgot the existence of the supreme father.

'Ode to Confession' expresses the Christian beliefs and practices. It comments on the convention of confession box in a church. It is a good religious practice in which every sinner has been given the opportunity to confess. The poem, on the other hand attacks the human behavior that has degraded such a sacred convention to a mere mockery. It asserts that at metaphysical and spiritual level there is 'a confession chamber' in every person. One must strive to be honest to oneself.

Life within could not hold

Truth below redemption. (2003-27)

The poem interrogates the Christian practice of confession and asks whether 'the human soul is really a custodian of faith?' The poem asserts that life has many facets and choices. One should try a hand at them.

THE IDEA OF SELF EXPLORATION:

Subjectivity is the prominent and peculiar feature of romantic poetry. The subjectivity is reflected in the choice of theme, the way of presentation, the treatment and language used in poetry. It is the personal touch and tone that differentiates Romantic poetry from poetry of other types. RomenBasu's poetry displays all these features. There are many poems in which the persona attempts to dissect his self. He tries to peep into his self and observes some peculiarities, weaknesses, lacunas, drawbacks, eccentricities and irregularities. He attempts to have a self-introspection through which his character is revealed. The psychological and inner process of self-examination leads him to understand his self. It thus, turns to be a journey of self-exploration and self-realization.

'Right or Wrong' a poem in *The Whistle in the Wind* presents the graph of the speaker's inner personality. He finds himself to be intellectual, generous, friendly and sensitive being. He had compassion, sympathy and goodness of heart. In course of time, he acquired such habits that they left him hardened, apathetic and a captive of emotions. He is now unable to know whether it is right or wrong.

First sight of difference

Intellect succumbs to a captive emotion

Letting compassion slide

Difference is the unbearable past. (2003-25)

In another poem entitled 'Without a Thought', the speaker appears to be worried, disturbed and restless. His mind has turned fickle and transient. He fails to react and gets frightened to face dangers. He has lost the power to determine and to act. He needs something powerful and positive to drive away the state of despondency.

Shrunken shadow whisks away

A single whistle in the wind. (2003-28)

SEARCH FOR TRANQUILITY AND SERENITY IN LIFE:

There are some poems by Basu that describe the spiritual journey of the speaker to a certain destination. They present the predicament and the state of mind of the persona. He has undergone self-introspection that has led him to self-realization. He experienced that the restless, agitated mind needed some sort of spiritual rest, comfort and solace. Thus quest for tranquility, silence or serenity in life became the next stage of his journey. There are some poems that depict the poet's quest for tranquility. At the same time, there are a few poems that describe the nature and qualities of such state.

'In Motion', presents the speaker in dismal, melancholic and agitated mood. His predicament has been heightened by the dark, dull physical conditions of an evening. He experienced different hallucinations and felt the need of some solace to quench his mind. The sudden arrival of a flock of birds provided him a short but temporary relief.

Heart full of envy at zero hour
Quenching thirst
From a rare interlude
Between long intervals. (2003-71)

'Resignation', is a purely philosophical and spiritual poem. The speaker, after enjoying all worldly pleasures and passions has realized their futility and meaninglessness. He now aspires for eternity. He has realized that 'in end, there is the beginning of worldly life'. Hence the true destination is surrendering the self and capturing the rare moment of peace that will take to the hour of solitude.

THE IDEA OF SURRENDERING THE SELF:

The spiritual journey of a person from the physical, material world of passions gets oriented towards the metaphysical, transcendental and other worldly experience of total peace and tranquility of the soul. It is an obscure, mystical and abstract experience at spiritual level. To reach at this heightened state, a person has to undergo certain stages of evolution like self-introspection, self-realization and self-extinction. Finally he comes to the stage in which he gets ready to surrender his total self. It is the transcendental stage when one experiences the unlimited space and existence of the soul beyond the material world. There are some poems by Basu in which the persona has come to this stage. 'Dark Water' speaks about the unbearable suffering of soul that wishes to surrender and get extinct.

Nothing quietens the restlessness
Misgivings of dark water linger
Fathoms of decade emotion
Exhumes without trepidation. (2003-79)

On the other hand, the persona (a lady) in 'All to Herself' is so self-centered and engrossed in worldly pleasure that she failed to recognize the call from within. She failed to understand the complex equation of body and soul.

What gives without a return
Mystery of life is handful
In the naked world
Hiding most pain. (2003-55)

Lastly, if one attempts to have an overview of the titles of RomenBasu's all collections of poetry; it is clearly noticeable that they indicate the journey from the physical and material world of passions to the metaphysical, spiritual and other worldly experience. It is an indication of his overall vertical progression as a writer. There is steady, gradual but definite progression and evolution of the persona. In the earlier poems, he seems to be engrossed in physical and sensual joys and pleasures but a change takes place in due course of time. Thus, RomenBasu, in his poetry, has given expression to his spiritual and mystical ideas which are deeply rooted in his personality and his interest in Indian Philosophy.

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