



High Impact Factor 8.1458 ISSN



Vol. 9, No. 1



Double-blind
peer reviewed

CLRI Feb 2022



Referred Journal



Page 252-261

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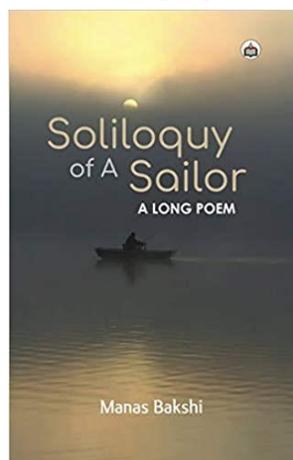
Book Review on Manas Bakshi's *Soliloquy of a Sailor* by Dr. R R Vadapalli

Dr. Rama Rao Vadapalli V.B

I wrote a lot about Manas Bakshi and categorized him as a progressive poet and I recall that thus. The poet is verily a creator, Brahma. He creates both from his personal experience, his imagination and his ability to put across his emotions and feelings in an appealing way. He has the capacity of envisioning and the skill of communication. Poetic skill is a spark, holding in mind a flash of lightning which leads to an insight and revelation. Manas Bakshi (now nearing sixty six, young in mind, underwent angioplasty and living on a pace maker) is highly imaginative and at times, a visionary but most importantly, a stubborn sufferer.

The poet's idea of the creative process stands revealed in all his poems. So far, he has published twelve collections, and won accolades and encomiums for being an exponent of the value of Indian English poetry. First / his thematic novelty, its attraction and exuberance are enticingly memorable. Secondly / the imagery used by the poet is brilliant. Its evocativeness is important and makes it appealing. Thirdly / the quality of the poet's imagination is appealing. Fourthly, the propriety in the thinking and daintiness in expression are weighed. Fifthly, the basic stance of the poet and the vocabulary whether it is pretentious, loquacious, sober or purposeful is assessed. Sixthly / the basic motive and the purpose of writing is also considered as to whether it is entertainment, promoting thoughtfulness, veiled, bald or subtle moralization.

What is remembered long is the spirit that is conveyed or transmitted. There may come many more poems for the perceptive reader. Now to the text on hand : *Soliloquy of A Sailor*. It is about journey of life as also journey after life in the eyes of a sailor. Journey of life is a reality, Journey after life is a mystery. But rooted to our spiritual faith in the indestructibility of *Atman* or soul, Manas deals the subject with profundity of knowledge of mythology and authentic philosophical explication. Undoubtedly, what Bakshi has poetized in this mini epic purports to be a collage of life with its variety and vicissitudes on the one hand, and a presumptive depiction of what may be there after this life. Most probably, I think, it is the outcome of his own experiences and perception during the critical hours between life and death he faced when he suffered the massive cardiac ailment. The title is poetically pertinent and it is an invitation arousing the curiosity of the reader. It is a prologue the mini-epic begins with and explains to the reader the purpose of the narrator.



The journey begins

For what? / Glued to reality / An earthly episode / Of living a life / Only self-realisation will unearth / Waves and waves / Surging around / Thought waves / Churning mind, / Scribbling on a blank sheet / Of dark nights, / Nocturnal ambivalence / Full of mystic lore / Haunting, archaic and also ecstatic / Questions: / How does it all / Revolving around one / While in the flesh / End one day / So suddenly, so pitiably / As to render at once / The existing ones dumbfounded / At a tragic moment? (p.12)

The protagonist, the extremely thoughtful narrator, the sailor, his innate self is the poet himself. He calls himself a cast off. From the agony — a bit of relief — his heart strives to acquire by hopeful imagination :

Earthly moorings cast off

“Look” commands his inner self, / “There’s water hyacinth / Flowing lifeless / It has no knowledge / Of either science / Or rebirth-like myth, / Lifeless, still / It can give / It’s born with / The underlying power to yield / A biofuel source: / Water hyacinth / Floating lifeless / Only to reappear afterwards / As fuel energy / From constant scientific search / Fuel from water hyacinth / Modern times need / For human beings to survive.” (p.17)

The speaker of the poem beckons his memory giving the title (**Memory calls back**”).

The speaker goes into ratiocination.

“Speaking so long to himself / Almost in a trance / The sailor looks around / Looks back Where-doubtless-he was / So far rooted to, / Nothing is visible / Past is dark, inarticulate / Still indispensable”. (p. 21)

“**Memory** / Painful or delightful / Often reveals / Some fascinating contours / More imagined than explored / Imagination or no imagination / Memory’s flying bird / Unmindful of its destination / Getting absorbed into its orbit / Is to relax in momentary respite / Or, wail in personal pain / Of reopening a chapter / Perhaps not

wistful / Even if it crawls on its own / To scratch on some chapters of life / Is it desirable / To drag on the last phase / Resorting to memory alone”.

“All is memory / To flash once again / When wings of imagination / Are clipped, / So clipped as can't spread anymore / Into the wonders of solitude / Inscribing the silhouette / Of the fleeting time, / Time brimming / From the beginning to the end / Assumes the hue / Of life-end blues :

A personal sky / Turns murky with / Blasphemy ascribed, betrayal contrived / And the innermost self seems / Stranded before a black well / Where the murmur of falling leaves / Resounding with the words / Of political gimmick / Had sunk long before / Humankind had a beginning!” (p.22)

Vignette of Relationships

The sailor-mind back into relationships : brothers, sisters, near and far, friends thought of and taken for granted. The vignette ends with a conclusion leading to painful dissatisfaction. The thoughts lead to the condition of numbness of the mind. True love, realization should be the touchstone for treatment and endurance.

Relationship

“Born of blood-link or love-ties / Sprouts amid percolation / Of thoughts and interaction of minds, / Grows amid / Thrilling revelry or biting isolation / Sometimes giving, sometimes claiming / Never clarifying the actual price / One should pay for / And the other be paid for / A relationship personalised / For, more often than not / It's volatile in vacillating mind / 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)

Life must be like a fountain sprouting water. It should aspire for a blissful after-life.

Viewing Relationships from a Different Angle

“Song of life / Its origin / Stream of love divine / Fountain-like the graceful one / Flowing down the hills / Intensifying with / The mesmerizing magnitude of His munificence / In the captivating bosom of Nature / Nurturing thousands of plants / Unknown, unidentified / Churning sensation / At the moment of efflorescence / In realisation of / The inner meaning of life / Even not being duly recognised / Nor being aspirant as some human beings / For a blissful afterlife.” (p.30)

Relations are of various hues, may be dim, shady, bright and scintillating.

“Variegated human relationships, variety in life / Known surroundings changing overnight / Known faces fleeing from sight / Rural pastures tinged everyday / With more and more urban imprints, / Spectre of murder after rape / Plunder of the already oppressed and wretched; / Future of civilisation at stake / Love adulterated; humanism mortgaged / To caricature human being / For being servile hypocrite / If not savagely lumpen / In self-deceptive existence / Till destiny takes its toll / Under one or the other pretext / Like anything else / A relationship may end at any moment / A latent layer of attachment remains / Remains often to interact / Even resuscitate till death.” (p.31)

The sailor, read speaker, goes on and on with a bunch of metaphor of flowers : With his insight into life, unfolds one after another before mundane eyes and Bakshi focuses on the same.

Wayside Wonders

“Remember, O sailor / You have come alone / Have to leave it alone / None has accompanied you / Nobody's your own, / What's only your own / Is the very monograph / Of an earthly sojourn / Empty-handed come we all / Wherefrom we don't know, / Empty-handed leave we all / This world forever / Is it for somewhere else? / Where to? / What's the next destination? / That too ever unknown! /

Surges inside always a glimpse / Of faces and figures left behind, /
Of thoughts and events not reconciled! / At the crossroads of / Myth
and reality / Transience and eternity / Life and death, / Ultimate
emptiness is all / That mundane fulfilment entails!" (p.34)

Musings could be nocturnal too. With the sailing ship, poetry goes
through days and nights. We are reminded of the witches in
Macbeth. Double, double, trouble

Nocturnal Musings

"Oh, what a glare! / The horizon in crepuscular attire / The homing
birds in bardic view / The sundown-kiss of the welkin / On the
plashing waves / Reverberating in mind, / As if someone asserts :
'It's only for you' / Night steps in / Rhythmic rataplan / From a
nearby tribal village / Transpiring, distinct / It's night / Night of
euphonic drumming sound, / Warmth of tribal dance / With
traditional gaiety and nomadic stance / Majestic beauty of night /
Possessing Nature's eyes cervine / Mystic impasto of night :
Invigorating the latent metaphors of mind." (p. 39)

"Today it's different. / Human psyche has started boiling / In the
cauldron of / showbiz civilisation / Long before we reach / The last
stage / New-progeny of tribals forgetting / Their inherent songs /
Vibrant in Nature's own language, / Have switched over to Jazz and
Pop! / Their thatched houses smell now / Of luxuries from shopping
Mall; / Let it be so / Snatched is their right to forest / Crushed is the
idyllic sylvan beauty / Enticed they are now / To the glare and glitz
of urban sprawl!" (p.41)

This takes us to the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge. "Alone, alone"
but Bakshi's depiction is different in so far as it deals with the crude
reality of modern life facing the threats of deforestation,
urbanisation and modernisation.

Lonely in Life, Lonely after Death

"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; / Oh! what a destiny! / Somewhere somehow / Everybody's adrift, boat like / The unseen *Atman* pulling the oar / Inscrutable remains the moving force, / The sailor thinks it's all / At his behest / 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)

“Alone / I can hear / The innermost sound / Of whoever sleepless / Facing the interludes / Of so far suppressed sequences / In the whistling / Of unidentified birds flying above, / In the mournful cry / Of the dead body bearers, / In the piercing scream / Of the jackal and the hyena / Reaching the brink of extinction.” (p.47)

The skilful poet plays with words and figures of speech in such a way that it touches our hearts and we realise all these emanate from our own feelings.

Voice of the River

“Voice of the river / Echoes the voice of a restless self / Seldom was anybody aware to mark / How the innermost voice was suppressed / While one left the battlefield / Failing to fight against / Own shortcomings, / The voice now vivacious again / With the curving waves / Distinct at midnight / Recalling some eventful moments.” (p.49)

Human psyche is unpredictably changeful; vacillating, maddened and driving others mad. Voice of the river and voice of a restless self — Bakshi's comparison draws a true picture of life in reality from a different angle.

Mystified Human Psyche

“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)

We remember the ancient mariner but Bakshi's insightful observation and perspicacious capacity to put to black and white what he finds in real life are different and praise-worthy. Real life experiences may be delightful and soothing and/or desultory and distasteful but Bakshi ventures to poetically vent his feelings in such way that we find something new and innovative to enrich our thoughts.

The Shapeless Divine

“It's much like a deity. / An image of God or Goddess / Imagined, shaped, worshipped and hallowed / Sometimes with desire / Sometimes with devotion. / Chanting hymns, offering prayers, / Rites and rituals over / The deity's immersed / Clay melts into water / Merges with clay in wait / To be reshaped again, / Only the structure takes time to wither away. / A fine shape is lost / In the fragments of all / It sustained as a replica of God or Goddess / That's never responsive / To the thousand queries of a probing mind! / Likewise, this embodiment / Has all the earthly elements imbibed / Moving, floating boat-like, / Microcosmic between life and death / To find out the eternal truth / Behind all living / non-living elements : The divine, shapeless.” (p.63)

Extremely thoughtful is the poet — thinking of and making the sailor soliloquising about the ultimate reality. Cohesiveness of thoughts and dexterity in inscribing the thoughtful words appropriately add a new dimension to the absorbing poem.

An Eternal Quest

“Like a sea-bound river / Stream of life – flowing – and flowing / Sometimes against violent strife / Sometimes with rapt delight / Passionate urge, emotional upsurge / All's needed for what's rolling within, / Seeking an articulation of the finite : A language of expression.”

“Stream of life / Craves for a rhythmic effluence, / Stream of love / Wards off communal outrage / One day, perhaps not far away /

Neohumanism will make its way, / One day, everyone will see / The celestial light at the end of the tunnel; / Because / Visible is the body / Not the soul, / Transparent are the worldly phenomena / Not the invisible urge / Of a burning charcoal!" (p.66)

"Forget not / All you have left / All you have to leave / Are feathers / Adorning so long your look / You can't brag about any more, / All you thought / And believed to be your own / Were the traits of transience / Graceful for the time being, / Responding to all / That Time conjures." (p.69)

A condition of maturity: the development is evident. Life teaches us so many things; and Bakshi, as a sentient and conscious human being has made the preaching of life his source of inspiration to move ahead with his literary pursuit — sometimes it is a probe into life, sometimes it is cogitating about the infinite.

Self-Realization Begins

"The sailor alone sleepless / Awake as the stars / Awake as the trees / Seems hounded by / The chiaroscuro-wilderness / Of an emergent nemesis- / Why is it so? / Is he beset with the thoughts? / Of a beyond-life sojourn? / Carrying like others / The burden of existence all along / Knows not how long / He will have to do it alone." (p.71)

All the component poems in this mini-epic are very, very, appealing. Long live the sailor the soliloquist!!! Any way, what is imminent is realised.

Soliloquy

"Crematorium or graveyard / Here ends everything / May from here or somewhere else / Spring up the seeds / Of a new beginning : Spark of life / Igniting / The reason of being." (p.76)

"Today — my rendezvous with destiny, / I too have this world to bid adieu to / Burnt or buried like any of you / Death always colourless / Sky-blue or ocean-blue / It means sinking into an engulfing abyss! / A meeting point sans appointment / With the full

moon of life itself, / Its eclipse preordained / Into the inexplicable cosmic vastness / All around's water / Endless and deep / A wandering self, a sailor myself / Awaiting the final dip." (p.78)

While the entire episode reflects Bakshi's probing and perceptive mind, there is a pragmatic evaluation of many facets of life though the enigma surrounding the question if there is life after death will remain. Novelty of thoughts aside, use of befitting words in portrayal of mellowness of a bardic outlook has enhanced the quality of the composition which may be aptly called an epic par excellence.

Manas Bakshi has climbed high. He would be remembered as a high flown poet of this age.

Dr. Manas Bakshi

Dr. Manas Bakshi, based in Kolkata, is an author, poet, critic, reviewer and short story writer.

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