

## **Spirituality in Yayati Madan G Gandhi's *The Rhyme of The Mystic Mariner***

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### **Abstract**

The present paper studies the concept of spirituality in Gandhi's selected poems entitled *The rhyme of the mystic mariner* (2017). The paper focuses on spiritual qualities and pragmatics as conceptualized in some of the poems. Spirituality is presented mostly in metaphors and personifications throughout the poems. The adopted methodology is both analytic and interpretive. Spirituality is treated on the three levels of trait, goal, and emotion. It blends Elkins' spiritual qualities with Beck's pragmatics of spirituality. The analysis of these concepts helps one detect a processual pattern. It is argued in addition to universality, phenomenology, mysterious energy, and compassion, Gandhi accentuates eternity (universal timelessness), oneness, love, and harmony. Love is the foremost spiritual emotion that accords one perspective,

insight, and awareness. It ends in Zen or contemplation, the pragmatic act that Gandhi's poetry highlights in the spiritual process. The paper concludes for Gandhi the Ultimate truth is harmony, the Ultimate state is silence (peace), and the Ultimate act is contemplation.

**Keywords:** Gandhi, spirituality, love, poetry, harmony

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## Introduction

The newest trends in human studies show a tilt toward the spiritual which is the long-ignored dimension of human psyche. The firmly established perspective of scientism is nowadays experimenting on spiritual issues which are among the vaguest and most abstract concerns. The newest lines of research in this area are psychology-oriented and cover clinical, counseling, and health psychology applications. These studies examine the relationships between spirituality and / or spiritual practice and mental, physical, and interpersonal health. (Ferriss, 2002; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Kim 2003; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003).

The present study adopts the same scientific lens in its approach to the spiritual and its role in Yayati Madan Gandhi's collection of poems entitled *The rhyme of the mystic mariner* (2017). For Hill (1999), the new breed of spirituality is often distinct from traditional notions of

religion. Kelly (1995) defines spirituality as a "deep sense of belonging, of wholeness, of connectedness, and of openness to the infinite" (pp. 4-5). For Wong (1998), the spiritual is that which "involves ultimate and personal truths" (p. 364). Elkins (1988) regards it as "a way of being and experiencing that which comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate" (p. 10). Differentiating spirituality from religion, Smith (2003) views religions as sets of beliefs, symbols, and practices about the "reality of superempirical orders that make claims to organize and guide human life" (p.98). For Bregman and Thierman (1995), spirituality refers to how an individual "lives meaningfully with ultimacy, his or her response to the deepest truths of the universe as he or she apprehends these" (p. 149).

Robert A. Emmons attends to the spiritual on three main levels: the trait level, the goal level, and the emotional level (2006, p. 63). At the trait level, spirituality is a capacity or ability which differs in individuals. At the goal level, it is a motivating force that "drives and directs personalized goals that one strives to obtain" (2006, p. 63). At the emotional level, the person experiences such spiritual emotions as gratitude, awe, humility, love, and hope (2006, p. 63).

Elkins' humanistic spirituality (2001) can be blended with Beck's pragmatic spirituality (1986). While the former provides qualities of spirituality, the latter deals with spirituality in practice. Interlinks between the two can be detected. The following table represents how the two theories can be matched together.

**Table 1.** Qualities and pragmatic features of spirituality based on Elkins (2001) and Beck (1986)

<b>Elkins (qualities of spirituality)</b>	<b>Beck (pragmatic features of spirituality)</b>
Spirituality is universal.	Awareness of the interconnectedness of things, of unity within diversity, and of patterns within the whole
It is a human phenomenon.	Insight and understanding
Its common core is phenomenological.	A sense of context and perspective
It is our capacity to respond to the numinous.	Acceptance of the inevitable
It is characterized by a "mysterious energy"	Gratitude, gladness, humility

Its ultimate goal is compassion	Love
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A common key concept shared by religion and spirituality is "sacred". For Hill et al. (2000), the term "sacred" is numinous and refers to a "divine being, divine object, ultimate reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual" (p.68).

The present study looks for the way Gandhi conceptualizes spirituality and sacredness in his poetry. Conceptualization of spirituality encompasses the two aspects: qualities and pragmatics. It further pinpoints relational and moral character of spirituality. The adopted methodology is analytic and interpretive. The concepts of spirituality are analyzed and interpreted within the body of the whole collection. The objective of the paper is to probe into Gandhi's discourse to find out the most common linguistic devices he uses to present either qualities of the spirituality or its practice.

### **Data and Analysis**

The analysis of the selected poems from *The rhyme of the mystic mariner* focuses on such quality-oriented concepts as universality, phenomenology, human-baseness, numinousness, mysterious energy, and compassion. As a sample, the paper has selected 60 poems from the collection in order to analyze conceptualization of spirituality. The selected poems cover different topics, are marked with various dictions and styles, and are

composed in various points of view. Intention has been not to narrow down the scope of the paper to any specific kind of poem.

The selected poems encompass different types of spirituality, religious, humanistic, and nature. However, the main focus of the study is on humanistic spirituality which has a pragmatic side to itself. The analysis of the poems shows the poet draws heavily on the sixth feature of spirituality which is compassion. Thus feature is best and mostly presented in the experience of love. Love itself is metaphorized variously. The title of the poem, "Love's embrace" (p. 6) is personified as a lover, a mother, or any other compassionate being. In the same poem, the concept of love is presented as a flow, a river, in continuous fluidity:

*To flee from death is to deny*

*the flow of love*

*life and time (p. 6)*

In "Love's longing" (p. 8), love is personified and simultaneously compared to a revolutionizing force and is thus implicitly represented as a "mysterious energy":

*amid din and fury of giant flares*

*love's longing slings and swings the spheres. (p. 8)*

"Living to love" assigns the attribute of sacredness to love and thus raises it to the status of a divine entity or turns it into an Ultimate Truth:

*Everyone is but a prince*

*with a crown in life*

*and a life consecrated to love. (p. 7)*

Living a "life consecrated to love" aspires to one's capacity to respond to the numinous. The poem further metaphorizes love as the mysterious energy of life:

*Praying to believe*

*believing to pray*

*living to love all life. (p. 7)*

In "Silent ecstasy", the poet bases his whole life on the emotional experience of spirituality which is love, as love is "the only emotion" he has (p. 9). Thus the poem relies on the pragmatic experience of spirituality. But the speaker does not suffice to this as he further on builds his whole phenomenology of life on love and thus transforms it to his ultimate reality of life, or a forceful energy that defines the whole universe for him. The poet states,

*my love I share with all beings*

*be they animals or wild beasts. (p. 9)*

These lines do not reduce love to a practice; they rather make love interlink all creatures in the world. Therefore, love here is a universalizing agent, a force that interconnects each and all together. This is one of the main qualities of spirituality that the poet ascribes to the emotional experience of love. The ending lines of the poem approve of this wherein the speaker prefers to die than to stop loving since:

*That dwells secure*

*in the sanctuary of my soul*  
*irradiating every part of the whole*  
*in silent ecstasy drowned. (p. 9)*

Personifying love as a dweller conceptualizes it; but describing his soul as the "sanctuary" wherein love resides consecrates the dweller and spiritualizes it. The last two lines view love as an "irradiating" force that covers every part of the whole and drowns it in "silent ecstasy". Ecstasy is a state of elated bliss and this attribution spiritualizes the emotion of love.

The other poem that explicitly deals with the concept of love is "'Love: The trusted ferry" which compares it to a vessel. In this poem, love is treated more than a mere emotion and is elevated not only to the status of a spiritualizing force, but a "mysterious energy" that gives human being perspective and sense of awareness; love "reveals to you your soul's divinity" (p. 21). The philosophical dimension this poem gives to the emotional experience of love represents it as a human phenomenon: "[love] destroys the delusion of duality" (p. 21). The poem draws links between the heart and the mind, thinking and feeling, by representing love as the forceful energy that brings man to a state of meditation and interconnectedness with the whole universe: "In love / you are one with all-soul" (p. 21). Such a state of oneness leads to meditation, "the selfless action becomes / meditation" (p. 21). The supreme state of bliss is brought about under the force of love by silence and peace, both

of which are universalizing: "Silence is soul's choice / . . . / just peace in oneness here" (p. 21).

In addition to love, which is a pragmatic and emotional experience, Gandhi tries to provide the reader with perspective and awareness of the way the whole world is interconnected. The interconnectedness signifies the universality of spirituality. One of the interconnecting forces is love. There are others like a sense of self-awareness. "The invisible jury" portrays a man dreaming the Doomsday (p. 3). Dreaming his shadow looms larger, he comes to realize his connection with the whole universe: "It [my shadow] encompasses the earth and heaven" (p. 3). His shadow is conceptualized as all-embracing. Significantly enough, the poem accentuates the moral or ethical responsibility the dreamer has with respect to the whole nature. An invisible jury takes him to task for all the harms he has done to nature: "'Are you the one who has devastated / the land and the sea, / spread pollution everywhere / making the planet uninhabitable?'" (p. 3).

The other case in which the poet emphasizes interconnectedness in the whole universe to visualize the universality of spirituality is in "Poems as actions" (p. 10). Here, the poet is described having the ability to interlink himself with the rest of the world. Expressing themselves and their common points with others, poets can "bridge the chasm between the isolate lone self / and all other persons in the world"(p. 10). For Gandhi, the spiritual

resides in silence. As shown in the case of love, silence and peace ensue from the spiritual experience. When he says, "Every poem as its origin in silence" or when he regards a poem as "a form of mute monologue or dialogue", he is actually giving a spiritual side to poets' work. Due to this feature, in "A poet's world" (p. 11), Gandhi refers to the emotional experience one has in reading a poem; it makes us "marvel how someone else is there like us" (p. 11). The resemblance the reader comes across throughout a poem marks the emotional interlink a poem creates among all people. This linkage is a manifest of the universality of spirituality.

"A touchstone" (p. 12) assigns a more functional role to the sense of commonness, giving the readers perspective and sense of awareness. A poem "Reveals what we are missing / impels us to discover why it is / how with ease can we fill the gap / adding a meaning and a purpose" (p. 12). The ultimate end of poetry is unifying all people "as members of the one human family" (p. 12). This unification is a manifest of universality of spirituality since it assigns oneness to all people. The metaphorization of the spiritual universality as a human family is repeated in "Song of Ganga" where speaks of "a global family / citizenry of the one earth" (p. 30).

Another quality of spirituality that has not been explicitly mentioned by scientific scholars of spiritual studies like Elkins and Beck, but has been attended to widely by Gandhi is its being immortal. Immortality is temporal

interconnectedness. Time has always been a matter of concern for human being since it marks his / her mortality. In Gandhi's poetry, time is mostly metaphorized as a passing river, flowing, as suggested by "Time's river" (p. 19). Paradoxically, the restrictive force of time is conceptualized as a redeeming force in these lines: "In time's river / everyone flows / nowhere to nowhere" (p. 19).

Pragmatically, the best eternalizing act is meditation or Zen. In "A crystal" (p. 22), the poet contrasts a frozen moment with the flow of time (the past and the future). In Zen or time of meditation, the frozen moment gets "immersed in Self's ocean" (p. 22) and thus becomes eternal. The capitalization of "self" here expands the sense of selfhood from the individual and the particular to the public and the universal.

Another poem that attributes eternity to the speaking self is "Blessed" (p. 23). Unlike the other poems that utilize third-person point of view, in this poem, the speaker uses first-person singular pronoun to strike more immediacy and intimacy in its communication of experience. The "I" speaking here is actually the spiritual self which has its own perspective and awareness of context. Knowing "whence life comes, whereto it goes", (p. 23), the speaking self introduces himself as the meeting point both spatially and temporally, "I know the secrets / of the self and the cosmos" (p. 23).

Expressed in first-person point of view, "A cauldron boiling" (p. 26) shows the speaking self-traversing time and space, "Older than Chronos / I am the desire-fulfilling-tree / my roots go back in time / my history defies record" (p. 26). The eternalized self personifies spiritual's mysterious energy which brings about sea-changes in the cosmos. Having settled on "the roof of the world", the speaker awaits "by remote sensing to see wherefore / in her womb a boiling cauldron" explodes "the golden egg / to wipe out every sign of life / Bottom of Form" (p. 26).

The seer poet in "Inner stillness" (p. 27) accords love the needed eternalizing power and thus interlinks love and eternity together: "By loving diligence / you sow seeds of eternal life / . . . / until love charts the way" (p. 27). "The play" interlinks eternity with life which is conceptualized as a play. It is "An all-knowing sage" (p. 41) that interconnects eternity with "the shoreless silence" (p.41). Silence and its different forms like solitude, peace, tranquility, and stillness become manifests of spiritual eternity. Acts like meditation, pondering, and reflection are alike pragmatic manifests of silence and peace. Accordingly, when the speaker is seen in any state of solitude or involved in any act of stillness, he is in fact experiencing a spiritual realm that has no spatio-temporal borders:

*In the stillness of mind's solitude  
he hears tranquil waves:  
the unfailing pointers to*

*where eternity keeps converse*

*with the shoreless silence (p. 41)*

In these lines, the spiritual has qualities of eternity, stillness, tranquility, and the experiencing self is in an act of meditation ruled by solitude. Only in such a state can self hear eternity and thus become spiritual.

The next two poems that rely on the manifests of spirituality are "My rafts" (p. 42) and "I sleep" (p. 43). The former intertextualizes with an earlier poem titled, "Love: The trusted ferry". In "My rafts", the speaker is a poet who finds his poetry as his only rafts to "ferry" him across after death, "Soon shall I fall asleep / no one for me shall weep; / my poems will my poems will rafts / to ferry me across" (p. 42). This intertextuality draws comparison between love and poetry in such a way that a poet's poetry is the expression of his love and this renders it his trusted ferry to help him out of mortality. In another register, a poet's work, stemming from his love, eternalizes him. In "I sleep" (p. 43), the poet conceptualizes his poem as his tomb wherein he resides in silence, "Here I sleep with my songs, / unmindful of envious tongues; / in peace I lie / with no wrench in my lungs" (p. 43). These lines express the poet's experience of the spiritual in the state of peace.

In "Sensitized speck" (p. 45), the speaking self-views his own existence as the eternal; he conceptualizes his self as "the living moment - - / eternal 'now' caught in-between / 'to be or not to be', / a kiss of immortality / from the unknowable beyond" (p. 45). The direct quotation, "To be

or not to be" intertextualizes the poem with Shakespeare's play of hesitation, *Hamlet*.

"Beyond" (p. 53) brings all qualities and acts of spirituality together. The speaking self uses first-person point of view to express the processes of his becoming spiritual. First, he speaks of silence, and silence descends. In his becoming mute, "time stands still, / the spin stops, / the wheel too" (p. 53). Becoming self-submerged, he becomes "word / beyond time" (p. 53). He enters the spiritual realm, reaching the state of Zen, "the source, / beyond mind, / beyond revelation" (p. 53). The same final state is reiterated in "Light of no-mind" (p. 55), "Free of sansara, / I am Zen, / bliss, / nirvana, / light of no-mind" (p. 55). The act of Zen is a human phenomenon that accords insight and awareness of the spiritual and the eternal.

It is only in the state of Zen and eternal stillness that harmony as another quality of the spiritual is realized. In "Soundless harmony" (p. 55), the first-person speaker views himself transhistorically, which is an eternal vision, "Inside me abides / the original sin / with roots in the genesis" (p. 55). Not only does he become timeless, but he traverses space by transforming into a void: "I become the void / stretching / through billions of light years / in the cosmic stillness" (p. 55). Reaching the state of "cosmic stillness" signifies his having entered the spiritual realm. It is only in such a spiritual world that he gets all-embracing and experiences harmony: "Vaster than the shoreless immensity / I am the soundless harmony / holding the

worlds / in my embrace" (p. 55). Finding harmony and becoming harmonious with the whole cosmos is not the last stage of spirituality. Rather, the spiritual becomes complete when one becomes harmonious with his own self. This is the numinous and Ultimate Truth the spiritual seer in this poem reaches, when he says, "Self in time / to self at any point in time, / I, the origin and the terminus. / My self to Self" (p. 56). Thus the poem stages the spiritual from the Fall and the original sin, goes "beyond the snares of worldliness" (p. 55), and passes through the void and cosmic stillness, to reach the stage where he comprehends his worldly self, instead of denying it, along with his universal and eternal Self. He can harmonize his "Self in time" to "self at any point in time".

The harmony that the speaker finds in "Soundless harmony" is named as "Om" in the following poem (p. 57). It is here that all the manifests of spirituality are interlinked together like a chain. "Om / the guide / across the void" (p. 57) reminds us of the speaker of the previous poem who stretches through time and reaches the void. The last stanza which presents the poet's delicate word-play with "Om" and "home" is highly suggestive of the harmonizing force at work in the spiritual process. The stanza reads, "Love / that beckons everyone / Home. / Om." (p. 57). Here, the word "love" can rhyme with "Home" and "Om" if it is pronounced in Indian English: / low / . Otherwise, it already rhymes with "everyone". In both cases, harmony in sound is observed. However, if it is pronounced in Indian English, it puts "Love", "Home", and

"Om" on the same scale and thus draws comparisons among them. Love is the mysterious energy that brings one "Home", that is, the spiritually harmonious state where "self" and "Self" become one. This harmonious stage marks the zone of Om, Zen, or contemplation.

## **Discussion**

As the analysis of the selected poems from Gandhi's *The rhyme of the mystic mariner* shows the spiritual is a processual state which has some qualities and pragmatic stages. In studies on spirituality, the scholars have provided us with features and stages of the spiritual. Gandhi's poetry, however, guides one through these. It takes the spiritual as a process rather than a mere state. Anyone who wants to touch the spiritual should pass through these stages. For this, the poet draws on methods of conceptualization, mostly metaphor and personification, to make authentic and palpable the spiritual processes.

The analysis shows Gandhi's reliance and emphasis on the mysterious energy of love as the best way of reaching the spiritual. While a scholar like Beck deals with love as only one spiritual practice among others, for Gandhi it is the best and the foremost rehearsal. Beck separates compassion from insight, awareness, and perspective. But Gandhi shows love provides one with all these. It gives us an insight which results in comprehension of harmony not only between self and the cosmos but also between self and selves. Love makes one aware of others, of oneself,

and thereby culminates in a state and act of meditation. While for scientists of spirituality, there is still a bar between the mind and the heart, for the Indian poet the barrier perishes away, melting "like a mass of foam / in the salt-kissed swirls" (p. 55).

Gandhi's mystic poetry highlights some qualities and practices that have only been implied in spiritual studies. While spiritual studies accentuate the universality of the spiritual, Gandhi focuses on the temporal side of this universality as well. With him, the spiritual seeker moves through both time and space to reach the sense of spatial universality and eternity. The eternal and eternity Gandhi speaks of does not mean denouncement of time. Rather, it comes from the very acceptance of and submission to time. But instead of remaining a slave to time, or getting mesmerized by "worldly snares", he passes through them to reach the eternal. The same also applies to his spatial traverses. He is well aware of his bodily existence and knows quite well he cannot reach the spiritual without his body. That is the reason that he reminds himself and the reader of his roots in the Original Sin.

Spiritual studies do not deal specifically with the objectives of spirituality. But Gandhi's poetry sets up a plan and defines the purpose of spiritual pragmatics. For him, reaching the sense of harmony with self and the whole cosmos is the Ultimate end of spirituality. This is the insight that love and Zen provide man with. More than mere formulating the spiritual, the Indian poet takes the

reader's hand and guides him through the spiritual recesses to arrives at "soundless harmony". What he shows us is silence and solitude are the requisites of sensing the spiritual and stillness and peace are the emotional experiences one undergoes in the process.

Gandhi's spirituality is not religious, but bears moral ethos. What he is seeking is arousing the requisite sense of responsibility in human being towards himself and the others. For him, others are both human and non-human, animate and inanimate. All creatures have rights and shares in being happy. Man's violation of the rights of other creatures summons him to the court in "The invisible jury".

The spiritual trip the poet takes the reader on gives the one the insight of Oneness wherein harmony can be found. Gandhi's Ultimate Truth is not religious, nor can it be figured out by mind. Rather, it is to be touched upon by the heart, that is, love. In "Rivering now" he states, "All options, permutations, combinations, / be it seven or umpteen, / point to the One, / the root of this mind-annulling mystery / the reason cannot reach" (p. 62). Aware of all this, the speaking self believes love affirms "soul's fulfillment" (p. 61).

## **Conclusion**

The present study analyzes conceptualization of the spiritual in the selected poems of Gandhi's collection. It detects the different spiritual qualities and practices in his

poetry. Comparing Gandhi's humanistic spirituality with the spiritual studies of Elkins and Beck, the paper reaches some similarities and differences. Gandhi's spirituality adds the concept of eternity or timelessness to universality of the spiritual. He emphasizes the emotional experience of love as the source of contemplation and Zen and presents it as the origin of spiritual perspective, awareness, and insight. His Ultimate truth is Oneness; his Ultimate state is Harmony, and His ultimate act is silence.

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