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Spiritual Concern in the Works of Manoj Das

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Abstract

My aim through this article is to discuss the issue of spirituality in Manoj Das's works which can be seen in many forms and ideas in his exquisite narration. He narrates an Indian experience in language which is alien or not Indian at the same time. He does not lose original Indian charm and ethos. In his works he shows his deep concern with spirituality. In his works spirituality is not a figment of imagination or a religious dogma or any firm ideology but it is a domain of realization where we realize (experience) values like truth, goodness, beauty, love, compassion, and also intuition, creativity, insight and focused attention in all walks of life. When he begins his concern with spirituality, he talks about "Soul". For him soul- a point of non-material energy, eternal in form and identity. The soul is not subject to change as is the body.

Key words- *Spirituality, Soul, Life, Death, Cosmic entity, Nature*

Introduction

Manoj Das is a bilingual writer who writes in both English as well as in Urdu. He is a fiction writer and has also written some short stories and poems. Manoj Das is a deft spinner of yarns and a great story teller. He narrates an Indian experience in language which is alien or not Indian at the same time. He does not lose original Indian charm and ethos. In his works he shows his deep concern with spirituality. In his works spirituality is not a figment of imagination or a religious dogma or any firm ideology but it is a domain of realization where we realize (experience) values like truth, goodness, beauty, love, compassion, and also intuition, creativity, insight and focused attention in all walks of life. Here spirituality means complete devotion to God and performing good karma in life thereby gaining divine blessing. Here spirituality becomes an aspect of a sincere way of living by doing noble deeds. His works show that spirituality is not about doing things or becoming someone else, it is just about being who we truly are. His works suggest a self-reflective existence as opposed to an

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unexamined life. Here spirituality emphasizes inner experience, introspection, a subjective journey, a personal well-being, an inner harmony or happiness.

When he begins his concern with spirituality, he talks about “Soul”. For him soul- a point of non-material energy, eternal in form and identity. The soul is not subject to change as is the body. The soul, which is not of the material world, it is the foundation of consciousness; this living, non-physical entity holds our personality, our thoughts, our desires and our ambitions. In *The Bhagwad Gita* Lord Krishna clearly says:

Soul is incapable of being cut; it is proof against fire, impervious to water and undriable as a well. The soul is eternal, omnipresent, constant and everlasting.” the body is like a temple and the soul is like the burning flame or deity within, Swami Vivekananda says, “You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul. (Radhakrishnan, 24)

For him, spirituality means complete reverence to God and doing good Karma in life thereby gaining His blessings. For example honesty – there is no such legacy as honesty. As Pope says, “ An honest man is the noblest creation of God.” (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44899/an-essay-on-man-epistle-i>) One cannot pursue one’s own highest good without at the same time necessarily promoting the good of others. A life based on narrow self-interest cannot be esteemed by any honourable measurement. Seeking the very best in ourselves means actively caring for the welfare of other human beings. Our human contract is not with the few people, with whom our affairs are most immediately inter-twined, nor to the prominent, rich, or well educated, but to all our human brethren. We ought to view ourselves a citizen of the world-wide community and act accordingly. Selfless action is the outward expression of selfless love. When the heart is filled with love, it expresses itself in the form of unselfish action. One is the deep inner feeling and the other its outward manifestation. Without deep unconditional love, selfless action cannot be performed.

There are several literary examples of creative and visionary poets or writers revealing primeval truths. No one never ever has laid claim over their poetic revelations which are universal spiritual truths. Of a radically different milieu and conviction, in their attempt to unravel the mystery of life and death, writers like Manoj Das secure the same rapport with the central spiritual reality, as could sages. Sages perceive truth through self-realization and poets perceive it through transcendental imagination. Once they realize out-of-body consciousness, the writers reach the realm of pure consciousness. Manoj Das here conveys the essence of ‘Advaita Vedanta,’ the cardinal tenet of which is the same Brahm alone is real. The universe is unreal and the individual soul is none other than the universal soul.

Very often Manoj Das talks about death. We find that he takes death in the ambit of spirituality. When he talks about “Journey”, the word journey signifies the journey of life. In

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this process of journey we face childhood, youthfulness and old age, then in this series death is also an unavoidable process. We know that if we get birth, one day we will die for sure. It is something inevitable. Similarly for those who die; birth, too, surely happens, if life happens, death is a natural process. We exist as a self-contained eternity. We try to contemplate our relationship with the Cosmic Entity and recognise the most compassionate kindness available to everyone of us. The absolute ideal is the Cosmic Ideal which is 'the Ideal' beyond the range of time, place and person.

Further, he tries to make understand his readers that we should not lament or wail at the death of our near or dear ones. We need to be ready to leave the world without sorrow. When we live a pious life and live in peace then we are never ever afraid of death. Our spiritual journey goes on and on after death, and no human being, while on this earth can assess its full power and extent. The soul maintains its consciousness and individuality after death, and is capable to commune with other souls on spiritual plane. The soul, whose reality the most learned of men has unable to grasp, and whose enigma no mind can ever hope to disclose. As Manoj Das points out in *The Escapist*:

We know that death will come to all sooner or later. We should accept our mortality (death) with humility. Very often it is found that we do not have much courage to face death. It is a matter of surprise that a number of people die, yet we wish to live forever. We must remember that death is not a full stop, it is not the end of journey. After death the soul departs from one body and enters into another to start another journey. Death is the ultimate destination for us. We cannot escape from it. Accepting death is the ultimate truth at the same time it enables us to have the courage to follow our heart and intuition. In fact, at the time of death we should not grieve too much. At this time we should lament or mourn to a certain limit. It should not be in excess. Spiritually enlightened person knows that death is nothing but a separation of soul from body and is basically a journey towards the final merger with the Supreme. It is a natural process when life's cycle completes itself, and we need not dread it. (*The Escapist*, 142)

Manoj Das in his fictions as well as in short stories throws sufficient light on life and death. From one perspective, just like a dewdrop life is transient, on the other hand our soul is a part of eternal existence. For someone who is not spiritually enlightened, life is momentary and transient. Whereas for spiritual seeker life is eternal and death is a lie. Neils Bohr assumes death as mystical because "We are both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence." (Faye, 24) Death has such a kind of mystical aura around it because its surety tempts us to ask questions about life and its mysteries. When we know the truth about death then we know and become more conscious about our life. In Buddhism it is believed that we should not disturb a dying person with too much lament or mourning. We let him pass peacefully. Actually, death is the separation of the most subtle body and mind from the more

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gross aspects of body and mind. This whole process is not sudden. It is a gradual process. That is why death is not a point in time. When it comes to death we should always remember the fact of the impermanence of life. Buddhism calls it the 'suchness of life'. In this way death is not the full stop of life, it is just a comma and nothing else. It is merely the end of the physical body. In *Bhagwad Gita* Krishna says that there is no death as such, because nothing dies, only forms change. This suggests that death happens a number of times in the long journey of a continuous life. Death is merely incidental. It is something that happens in between. Each existence is self-contained eternity, beyond which there can be no space, or time or 'death'. (S. Radhakrishnan, 142)

Further, Manoj Das seeks spirituality amid nature. It is in amid nature, where we indulge in leisure: walking, fishing, climbing, swimming, playing. It's forests, beaches, rivers, seas, mountains, hills, over all picturesque beauty of nature – they provide us the backdrop for these activities. In this sense, it has what economists call 'recreation value'. Nature has a great healing power. It is a way of experiencing peace of mind and a positive approach to life. Nature provides great opportunity to explore our own spirituality and learn skills of reflection which will help develop inner calm, clear thinking and personal well-being. Here writer enjoys the bliss of nature. He shares his extraordinary experience when he is amid nature. Natural sights have the power to heal the body, enlighten the mind and inspire the heart. Here the writer presents a fascinating explanation of the miraculous phenomena that occur at him. Very often the writer conveys his thoughts by personifying nature. As in one of his passages of short story *Chasing the Rainbow*, the writer writes:

The sun is 'sleepy' and it is sinking in the west. Hilltops and forests are exchanging smiles which are "meaningful". All things are the works of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things and moreover He is also above these things and people. They want to say that it is not only human being enjoy the blissful nature but natural objects themselves enjoy the serenity, purity, peace of nature. (*Chasing the Rainbow*, 152)

Eminent philosopher E.O. Wilson says, "all animal behavior, including that of humans, is the product of heredity, environmental stimuli, and past experiences, and that free will is an illusion. It can be referred to the biological basis of behaviour as the "genetic leash. (*The Meaning of Human Existence*, 224)

One can live that way only when one knows how to be free from all the stupidities of one's life. To be free for them is only possible in becoming aware of one's relationship, not only with human beings, but with ideas, with nature, with everything which is connected to us in some way or the other. Here the writer enjoys the soothing touch of wind; fragrance of waterlily; fragrance of wet earth. By taking a course in good water and air and in the eternal youth of nature we may renew ourselves. Manoj Das, in his works, enjoys natural scenes and sights. In one of his passages he describes strikingly beautiful and sublime natural scenes and sights. He personifies the natural objects as he writes "the moon is 'gnawing' through the

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clouds and descending a few steps to have chat with hills.” (*Chasing the Rainbow*, 87) The writer believes in the oneness of spirit. The great spirit, who created all the creation, pervades everything. The writer observes a kindred spirit in all natural objects. The writer has an appreciation of nature’s beauty as intense as any Romantic poet.

Here, nature empowers people to take charge of their lives and awaken them to their pure inner selves. It gives insight and focused attention to how and why we think and behave in certain ways. The natural process reveals many of our subconscious beliefs and perceptions that control our thoughts and feelings and the consequent behaviours, and then takes us on a journey of self-transformation. Here, writer wants to convey his message that when we are involved with outdoor pursuits, we experience instinctive feelings. We have a tacit knowing about the aliveness of the nature that moves us towards feelings of self-transcendence, describing them as ‘epiphanies’ or ‘peak experiences’ - revelatory episodes of a transcendent or mystical nature. There is a sense of well being in nature not simply a sense of being at one with nature. He defines spirituality in a number of ways. When he defines it as a process of creating relationship with what we hold to be sacred. Here, sacred means something inclusive of and interactive with the everyday; something held dear; something to be respected, revered, and protected. One is reflected in the notion that the earth is sacred through the animating life force connecting the ‘mysterious’ and ‘infinite complexities of natural world’ then there is the more human-centred position, where special places and symbolic objects become sanctified by creating relationship with them. Normally in every Hindu family veranda, we can easily find a Tulsi plant which is considered very pious, holy and sacred. Even it has got mention in our so many religious books. Likewise, Neem and Peepal tree are also considered to be pious. Being in wild nature engenders a sense of mystery about the world; a sense of awe or wonderment about the earth or particular nature; a sense of connectedness or oneness with the natural world; a profound feeling of transcendence (within and without); a belief in a power greater than oneself; and an appreciation of the beauty in nature. It sparks feelings of inner peace, hope, joy and empowerment, promotes physical and emotional well being and brings about ‘significant’ changes in attitude and behaviour.

Furthermore, writer tells that he has enjoyed a lot in the realm of nature. He is constantly surrounded by it and interacts with it. He is very much eager to know the mystic phenomena of nature. He wants to talk to birds, he wants to feel the presence of mystic presence of spirit of nature, he wants to swim across the lake. He wants to be the inseparable part of the natural phenomena. For him, kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water is a real and active principle. He wants to establish a good rapport with natural objects. Nature provides a logical and practical understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter, as well as an understanding of the interplay between souls, God and the material world. In one of his novels, for example in *Tiger at Twilight*, he talks, at length, about natural phenomena. He talks about ‘the play of light’ (22). He talks about cosmic light or in other words sunlight; Infuse body and mind with the cosmic light and energy of the morning sun.

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This ignites the atmasoorya or inner sun (*Tiger at Twilight*, 23). Light causes reflections and shadows. The rays of light in the atmosphere are imperceptible, but when they fall on any object it becomes visible by the virtue of the reflection caused by light, which also causes shadows. Similarly, when we observe ourselves with this inner light we perceive reflections and shadows within. Once the symptoms and shortcomings are diagnosed, they can be forced, encountered and obliterated as in *Tiger at Twilight*, he writes “Pure conscience is light: It is love.”(27) Here we find that, the writer, Manoj Das, is in very much love with the company of nature and natural objects. The writer loves the earth. His attachment is growing with the age. Nature leaves a great impact on him. To him, nature is soothing, strengthening, cleansing and healing. Now he is able to think more deeply and to feel more keenly. He can see more clearly into the mysteries of life and come closer in kinship to all natural objects. According to the writer, nature, in particular teaches us to address human concerns and values. It is only in nature we are bestowed with God’s blessings and protection, which we all need so desperately in these turbulent times.

To conclude, what we have observed, there are three critical features of the concept of ‘spirituality’ and Manoj Das has shown vividly how and why it makes a difference to us both as individuals and as groups. First of all spirituality expresses the reflective human quest for identity and meaning beyond a purely pragmatic approach to life. Second, it suggests that a full human life needs to move beyond self absorption to a sense of the greater good and service of others. Finally, and more importantly, spirituality relates to a process of unlocking the creativity and imagination that enables us to touch the edge of mystery. In the end, the spiritual way of life reaches out towards a wholeness and completeness that we never definitively grasp. There is always ‘a more’. Here, it is fruitful for us to stay hungry and inquisitive for spirituality. As a result in order to seek the totality of everything we must let go of a desire simply to accumulate more things. In that sense, ‘spirituality’ acts as a counter to the culture of consumerism.

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