

## Soliloquy of a Sailor (A Long Poem)

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Paper Received on 11-08-2023, Accepted on 11-09-2023,  
Published on 12-09-23; DOI: 10.36993/ RJOE.2023.8.3.179

Soliloquy is a literary device: a word etymologically used to refer to a monologue delivered by a character while being alone. *Per Se*, soliloquy tends to let us have access to a character and his/her true inner state-an insight into character's intimate thoughts, hopes, intentions and motives. It springs from Latin roots. Sophocles used soliloquy to depict protagonist's state of mind applied to a range of emotions. The opening Speech in Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus" {1} is an early example. Later Elizabethan writers used this literary figure in abundance to enrich their dramatic /poetic proficiency. Thenceforth, soliloquy-poetry got accepted and grew gradually in conventional traits to denote the solo utterance. Modern/Post modern era counts countless soliloquies written in poetic-verse. While meta-modernism inescapably represents soliloquy as veritable characteristic of the age. Instagram and YouTubers have unarguably won and reached to more readers than ever before. Michael Donaghy {2} who died in 2004 has written greatest monologues such as-"Conjure" and "Black Ice and Rain". In India soliloquy-poetry has been attempted with profound impact by poets such as-Vandana Khanna, Sunu Chandy, Shikha Malaviya, Menka Shivdasani, Anindita Sengupta and a host of others. Among

present- day writers Manas Bhakshi has carved irreplaceable eminence by writing 13<sup>th</sup> collection of poems-**Soliloquy Of A Sailor**. It's a long poem that appeared from Author's Press : New Delhi in 2020. {3}

This long lyric has power to hold reader's attention conspicuously as it views life here and here-after philosophically and metaphorically in a way immutable. Life is depicted as a long and meandering river while the protagonist as a sailor ferries to enact mystically. The book : a song of life composed in 14 chapters with notes and excerpts is dedicated fittingly to cultured duo : the men of letters. Initially infinity represents, as stated by the scriptures- "*Shiva aapo santu*" {4} ocean having nothing but water- "Water, water, water /Blue, deep blue, sky-blue..." (1-9). It beckons aforesaid river of life for final merger. The river being finite manifestation of formless infinite : a feminine macrocosm in the microcosm- "As a fascinating damsel/ Knows how to dance/ On the wavy water/ And also aptly flirt". (1-9). The poem depicts in amusing/ witty way the known pains proven and common homely pleasures consummated- "The eternal riddle- /Between a beginning/ And an end" (1-10). The Upanishadic syllogism concerning the Jiva and Paramatma- "*Dwa suparna sayuja sakhayam samanam vriksham parisaswajate*" {5} unequivocally

defines, innovates conditions pertaining to the spirit-the substratum of sailor's aim and objective of the journey. That is why, the inaugural of the journey prefigures a cogent attempt that discovers to affirm protagonist's existential/literary identity. In order to have a clear and comprehensive view it seems advisable to study the book Chapter-wise. There are 14 Chapters further parted into subsections to provide an instructive/fascinating reading of the text to somewhat familiar readers with the art, craft and demeanour of Manas Bakshi. The first part of the book has three subsections concentrating primarily on imagery, ornamentation and intellectual rejuvenation. The image of water is so concrete that it instantly grows into a perennial source of life uplifting readers to a cerebral and celestial echelon.

The poet in second part-"Earthly Moorings Cast Off" winds up 7 subsections so as to complete meaning, maxim and mission. The image as well as the sub-section both pithily reveal an inadvertent impact and subsequent elaboration of the theme based on the Bhagwad Gita{5} and its contemporary relevance - "...mingling/Of the soul-indestructible/With the infinite-ultimate."(2-13) Contemporary upheavals social, religious, economic, political, regional and national concisely form his psyche which appear restless despite materialization, realization and dispassion - "A self/Shattered most or fulfilled to the core/Untied for ever."(1-12). He seems rising against the currents of prevalent beliefs and practices to give a clear view of the soul: its true nature, purpose of journey

and ultimate salvation. Biological, emotional, rational, moral and creative energy flow unhindered to shape poet's distinctive individuality besides distilling existing eco-linguistic pollution. All - from one sensed amoeba to highly exalted beings, possess ability to be active/amused in earthly sojourn before closing into union with the infinite-the divine. The difference lolls in Karmic coverings. The righteous or dharmic course leads to acceptable understanding of the free-will paving way further for designing/writing one's own destiny. As existence is beginningless and infinite one's personal penance is instrumental in liberating S/he from Karmic bondages besides bestowing eternal abode of bliss-the Siddha Sila.

In later part "Memory Calls Back" brimming with creative beauty and aesthetic symmetry-"Speaking so long to himself/Almost in a trance"(1-18) the sailor as an all-rounder looks back into his roots: the past-"Past is dark, inarticulate/Still indispensable..."(1-18). Then stands on the shore to hear the call, it is the call of his own voice-"It is none/But your conscience, awakened inner self"(1-18). In silent ocean of contemplation, it is like a ripple, a bubble pulsating within making the Sailor aware of pains and delights/ joys and woes of his existential itinerary. Like disciple Arjuna listening to the gospel of Shri Krishna the devout sailor questions the Lord for late awakening of conscience and for purporting his intuitive quest. Also-"Hurls invectives against/Offence and injustice"(2-19). He is even ready to take up the cudgel and fight against offending opponents as advocated in -"The Bhagwad Gita"{6}. The world

being a battle field and the war almost over the ongoing sailor like a recluse/seer possesses nothing, has no accumulations except –“Memory of people and place/Contours of relationships/Appearing everlasting”(3-19). However,time comes to interfere and coalesce with silence to convey the message of nature and existence.The sailor aware of the loss-“Mirror- image tarnished/Glass house dismantled/ No remnants,no belongings”(4-20),still seems confidently saddled on the memory-“Memory’s a flying bird/Unmindful of its destination”(5-20) so he crawls albeit tentatively to create/scratch some chapters on/of life to continue the soliloquy.As the future course of Sailor’s journey is negotiated by the weird-world of imagination existential mystery rides on tides to embrace the unknown never ending horizons further expands and dives into the bottom of deep blue oceans to explore – “What is there/Beyond one’s existential periphery”.(6-21).The poet moves ahead-gives expression to natural-landscapes steeped in differences of colour,class and many other social inequalities to juxtapose the mundane human world of love and hate.Everything from early childhood to the last-phase of his own life is cycled around his memory and mind.All beginnings have an inevitable end therefore the profanity or the blasphemy called worldly life-“Had sunk long before/Humankind had a beginning”!(8-22).The mundane or the temporal world devoid of faith and purity has no stability,it is in a continuous state of unrest/ flux.

In “Vignette Of Relationships”(23-26)-a brief and evocative picture of

protagonist’s rapport with homely ties born either of blood or of love is portrayed succinctly. Human relations elaborate and baffling as the lattice of the universe often preponderate-“Faltering steps,multiplying mistakes”(3-24),where-“Expressions coglomerate”(3-24) and the quandary of-“Individual boredom and loneliness”(3-24), of “untimely detachment /... whispering darkness ” (3-24) displays a cheerless yet eloquent tenor having tendency to convey: the momentous,the tremendous and the simultaneous in one go.Many attributes pertaining to individuality,memory and existence debate throughout to build subtle subjective images,ornate idioms,philosophical/ psychological undertones and shades of colors underlying imaginative/intellecual and emotional play of varying moods called temper-tantrums.The innerself of the protagonist while speaking of conjugal romance,love and nostalgia delves-deep into reality -“God like giving/Mother like caring/Earth like enduring ?”(7-26) and asks without being least didactic to interrogate, understand and abide.

The nature teaches,instructs and nourishes like a mother selflessly-“It’s love with affection/And without expectation of being repaid.”(5-27)The morbidity, mundanity and the mortality of human life from birth to death travel without grievances.The clouds,rain,sunshine,birds with their songs form earthly ambience and rhythm, while harmony in nature and melody in existence form inner world of time and space.Time echoes back and one transcends to unravel the mystery behind ancient relics and pre-historic signs to

identify his/her heritage. The cyber-age of Valentine love, of- "Contractual marriage, live-together/And the new world of LGBT"(5-30) has transformed almost every human relationship into mere-Myself/Yourself. It has put civilization at stake by the growing practice of adultery and impurity by resuscitating desires and attachments of life till death: the shattering of physical frame.

The world being a wanderland offers a variety of wonders, flaws and adornments, royal and impoverished- "More unknown than known"(6-32), cagily greet the Sailor at the route of the journey, make him aware of - "dusk and disorder"(6-32) while infiltrating behind and beyond- "the celestial light"(6-32). The Sailor like all other human beings, diverse in nature, divergent in kind often adversarial addresses his own self- "to gain and regain/The spirit of selfless love"(6-33). Afterwards utters many profound truths mundane and metaphysical pertaining to the end of the journey, its destination, possessions/belongings and detachment- "Remember, O sailor/You've come alone/Have to leave it alone"(6-33) and concludes as a nihilist by affirming the nothingness, the emptiness and the meaninglessness of mundane satisfactions, joys and pleasures. The end of the world offers many insightful musings- "Life here-full of wonders/Life hereafter too"(6-34). It is a changing reality, a fresh beginning and quite a correctional knowledge of the eternal soul.

"Nocturnal Musings"(39-43), is an intellectual exercise to dive into comparative historical significance of

civilizations. The boat and the sailor both are one, crossing through the river of life they travel together and are about to merge. Their final dip, merger into the sea of infinity, into the ocean of eternity denote finite-infinite relationship. Prior to this the Sailor speaks of his propensity and penchant for the invigorating natural beauties of a nearby Indian tribal village- "With traditional gait and nomadic stance"(7-39). Nature and the cadences of tribal life from the "Onga of the Andamans"(7-40) to the "Massai of Africa"(7-40) present a contrasting view of the world literatures. Indigenous old environmental systems and extinct civilizations divulge imperfections/incompleteness humanity is surviving and has survived through ages. Protected by the laws of nature humanity step-by-step from- "thatched houses"(7-41) grew to feel the odour of - "luxuries from shopping Mall"(7-41), of "Showbiz civilization"(7-41) and then- "to the glare and glitz of urban sprawl!"(7-41). The language of love-song of whistling birds replaced by internet prone, smart phone addict promiscuous progeny now gripped in the grime of modern life-style is sure to meet extinction/deluge once again, the poet avers. That's why the Sailor laments poignantly on life-death-rebirth triangle by yielding to parallel socialism of equality- "Here, all are the same/As we were in the womb/Of pre-birth solitariness"(7-42). Being part of the whole the sailor views himself as a sole witness to the impending drama on the stage of life- "From a close distance!"(7-43). The events, occasions in life and the pains, sufferings undergoing

life-experiences cause dispassion. Besides, dispassion is born out of the desire to reach something higher, to a path leading to enlightenment. In case of the Sailor the dispassion comes from knowledge or wisdom. A broader understanding of the transient nature of things also brings non-attachment to routine objects or situations.

The soliloquy continues to shed light on life : a reflection, a spark like a boat adrift - "Oh! what a destiny." (8-44). Beautifully detached is the image of Atman wrenching and yanking, propelling and paddling then rowing the boat of life. The body or the so called frail structure of sailor's physical form skip from childhood to advancement of the age by wrangling periodically to find out ensuing illumination. A task/legation and a life-goal which needs unhampered fulfilment. The lone body struggles in solitariness to transcend the ordinary in order to arrive at the extra-ordinary for the revelation or enlightenment - "Alone/Very very alone/It's indeed-all along." (8-44). The soliloquy itself turns lonesome when the sailor apprehends the pains of restless longing for invention - "How painful it is/To be really left alone" (8-45). The known wholesome beauty and splendor of nature transport the protagonist into another realm of mystic journey transcendent and resonant with cosmic rhythm. Occasional flashes of light illumine but loneliness persists. The dark moments lost in the darkness of the night conceal sparks for a new dawn: a prelude to the unknown divine and an eternal dilemma dallying mortal existence. The Sailor hears

inmost heavenly sounds created by birds, by their fluttering and flying motion instantly correlates them with the ghastly mundane below - "In the mournful cry/Of the dead body bearers/In the piercing scream/Of the Jackal and the hyena/Reaching the brink of extinction." (8-47). All this juxtaposes well the twin aspects of mortal existence: the mundane and the Supramundane in usual stylistical way.

"Voice Of The River" (49-55) reverberates voice of the restless human self - the man and his mind. The self-struggle against bullying forces in order to gain distinction - a habitation and a name is the major premise adhered to liberation /salvation of the self from illusory material bonds. Aptly so, the Sailor on his frail boat sailing to cross - "The life-river/Surging with waves transient/Sometimes suave/Sometimes turbulent" (9-50) with unswerving destination. A realized self known or unknown, one among - "Like millions' footfalls" (9-50) many devout devotees coming to perform ritual worship with paraphernalia's garnered from inherent tradition/culture. Against such a backdrop Nature in its millions of forms smiles, soothes, ravages and submerges - "Bring you often disaster" (9-51). Man too is despoiled within like the river - "Silted and polluted/Beyond measure" (9-51). The illusory world of - "Half-hearted human offerings/Can consecrate-" (9-53) is further enriched by depictions of apt images such as - "That needs to maintain ecological balance/To survive" (9-52). The Oneness of faith affirms non-duality. Tree-dryads, water-nymphs, moon-light and many more nature mysteries magnificently

coalesce with metaphysics to add up to-“the cause of humanism/As his/her goal”(9-55).

The word-Psyche, has a long history dating back to ancient times representing vital premises/concepts or system of beliefs for understanding human nature from a scientific/rational point of view. The poet-Sailor dwells in human mysteries from-“Longing and love/Passion and emotion”(10-56) and man's struggle for existence-“Poverty or wealth/Drought or rain”(10-56) to the ultimate destiny-“reduced to ashes/Or/Buried in the grave”(10-56) that is -“an ever unknown/Metamorphosis”(10-56). The end outstrips human nature be it-“Humble or boastful/Amiable or snobbish”(10-57). The quest leads to realization subsequently to submission by means of offering Prayers. The journey is full of ecstatic escapades- of songs/predictions combined with the blissful murmur of eternity. The transitory phase of life though shaped by-“symphonies and syllables/Harmonized”(11-62) yet is-“Burning/Everyday, every night/On the pyre/Of desire unfulfilled”.(11-62) The origin of man is a quintessence-“A form/Identified with a name”(11-62) enlivened and energized by-“formless non-entity”(11-62). The quest continues awaiting Sailor's discovery of eternal truth-“Behind all living/non living elements/The divine.”(11-63). Moreover, it is the discovery of an image of God or Goddess- to a great degree in the sculpt of a deity. The deity in hallowed shape is worshipped with full devotion-“Chanting of hymns, offering prayers/Rites and rituals”(11-63). Likewise the self in man imbibe the shapeless-“the

timeless, endless, rimless vastness.”(11-64) So the poet as a sailor preferably intonates -“Soham-I am He”(7-64) to continue finite journey and quest eternal. A picturesque and pleasing musing on emptiness, nothingness and on-“the seraphic manuscript”(12-67), on yearning and death teaches and inspires-“To make a mortal realise/Its living worth”(4-68). Remembrances of things past galore, music emanate from inner self-the soul, freshness like new foliage beautify life and times. Melody of nature/creation-sensitize, resounds to bang immanent cosmic spheres besides drifting to the graceful delights of immortality and non-duality-“Be one with the only one/You search within/...And feel engrossed/In realisation of the invisible One/Living within”(8-70). Loneliness shapes individuality, wilderness of wastelands haunts and hounds as impending Nemesis-“beset with the thoughts/Of a beyond life sojourn”(13-71). Beyond/after life sojourn is a so-called existence in which the essential part of an individual's stream of consciousness or identity continues to exist after the death of the physical body. Accordingly the Sailor has to lug the load of existence singly. The mystery of the unknown realm-be it a hell or a heaven is undefined, so-“Nothing is defined/Find out the divine light/At the journey's end...”(13-73). Notwithstanding self-proclaimed doctrines pertaining to reincarnation, resurrection, rebirth, metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul the Sailor has too to say something inventive in his own inimitable candour. What dwells -“Beyond the biological level/Beyond all hedonic instincts”(13-73) avers the

protagonist of the poem is Atman. Atman also called Jeevatman is not separate from the body. It is an embodied being-bound in the shackles of life/death cycle called Samsara struggling hard and fast for liberation-Moksha by the application of Karmic set of beliefs-“O sailor/Pulling on and on the oar/To reach the shore/Forget not your origin:/The formless.”(7-74). Death is not the ultimate end-the final break up, the disintegration of finite-infinite bond. There is another realm the cosmic womb-the *Hiranyagarbha* in infinite frothing ocean wherein the seeds/orbits for regeneration/reincarnation endlessly inhabit/ float and foam to recycle-“The Karmic dues of previous births”(6-78) and transmigrate to-“A meeting point sans appointment/With the full moon”(9-79). Thus, the Sailor profoundly masquerades in/around/across inexplicable vastness of the cosmos to sum up his soliloquy-“All around's water/Endless and deep/A wandering self, a sailor myself/Awaiting the final dip.”(9-79). Continuity is the message the song of this long poem go along with. Here is an opportunity for the reader to dive into the physical, the metaphysical, the

intellectual and the intuitive sphere of Manas Bakshi: the man and the mind. The Soliloquy is followed by eight brief 'Notes'(80-82) giving clarity to Indian thought patterns and spiritual leanings. Excerpts from reviews in papers and journals of repute bring the book to a close besides introducing the poet to his favorite, dear-dear readers.

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### How to cite this article?

**Suresh Pande**“ Soliloquy of a Sailor” Research Journal Of English (RJOE)8(3), PP:173-179, 2023, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2023.8.3.179