

An Aroma of Spirituality and Indianness in the Poetry of Vishnu P. Joshi

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ABSTRACT

Vishnu P. Joshi is a familiar name widely published, globally recognized, and innumably awarded in the world has many published collections of poetry entitled *Discover This India Today* (1996), *Echoes of India* (1999), *Anjali: Whispers of the Soul* (1999) and *Anjali: Whispers in the Dawn* (2001). Though, settled in the U.S.A. and educated in the Western atmosphere, the poet's soul is still pure, immaculate, taintless, and even brimming with the love for India, its people, culture, tradition and rich heritage. His unflinching attempts to make Indians awake and enlightened with the true Gyana on the famous dictums of Indian Philosophy Uttishth Jagrat Prapya Varannibodhat i.e. 'Awake and Attain' and Chraivati Chraivati i.e. 'Keep on Acting' inspires the reader to rebuild and reconstruct the Nation as well as unite her, mirror the enormous energy of the poetry and the sacredness of a true poet which sighs and bleeds at the sight of pain and prays for the prosperity of the nation and its people.

Keywords: *Spirituality, philosophy, Anjali, Gandhi, Jivatma.*

Vishnu P. Joshi born in Barhanpur in 1934 educated in Munic with his special studies on Electro Physics (Ph.D.) and worked with scientific Institutions and Industries of U.S.A., is a familiar name widely published, globally recognized, and innumably awarded in the world has many published collections of poetry entitled *Discover This India Today* (1996), *Echoes of India* (1999), *Anjali: Whispers of the Soul* (1999) and *Anjali: Whispers in the Dawn* (2001). Though, settled in the U.S.A. and educated in the Western atmosphere, the poet's soul is still pure, immaculate, taintless, and even brimming with the love for India, its people, culture, tradition and rich heritage. His unflinching attempts to make Indians awake and enlightened with the true Gyana on the famous dictums of Indian Philosophy Uttishth Jagrat Prapya Varannibodhat i.e. 'Awake and Attain' and Chraivati Chraivati i.e. 'Keep on Acting' inspires the reader to rebuild and reconstruct the Nation as well as unite her, mirror the enormous energy of the poetry and the sacredness of a true poet which sighs and bleeds at the sight of pain and prays for the prosperity of the nation and its people:

My master, sky after sky illuminate this world, but
My Bharat is all in the dark
Wouldst though lend thy light to wake up India again? (Joshi 10)

In ‘Discover This India Today’ he remembers the glories of India in human form i.e. Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Nehru and even Ashoka Chakra and saddens to see Blind Justice, Deaf Rulers, Inhumanity Capitalism and Penury. He awakes his Indian brothers:

Awake my brother awake
From your heart and soul awake

Open your eyes and behold
The soul of Bharat bleeds,
The soul the Mahatma weeps.

Tears of deception rinse the memory of Nehru. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 17)

The poem ‘Ganga’ is not a mere tribute to holy Ganga but the poet’s wish to make India sweet, beautiful, great, prosper and a country where teaching of Buddha and Gandhi and the song of eternity flow incessantly. He beautifully asserts:

You are God’s very image;
Flow! Make India more beautiful.
Whisper your eternal music in your endless water

Let the promise of Buddha and Gandhi be true (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 35)

He shivers with utter dejection at the rapid decline of India’s proud, glory, spirituality and its belief in immortality of soul which once was a land of cultural, ethical and moral values and of many glorified saints. Native surge is the core of Joshi’s poetry. He is new voice who is projecting the indigenous values more forcibly and enthusiastically than those living in India. He wishes to become the messenger of Indian culture that is rooted in love and peace, but he is all the sadder at its decreasing glory:

There was a time
When I heard the song of Mother India
VANDE MATARAM.

An unparalleled celestial song. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 46)

At another place, he says:

The words from the heart of India quiver,

Because the lips that song Vandemataram remains betrayed. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 49)

In spite of his long sojourn in U.S.A. the memory of sweet India, his motherland are still inspiring and enriching his body and mind. In ‘My Uncommon Master’ he collects the reminiscences of his life in India, “When I learnt the Indian alphabet, I began scribbling on small chits of paper messages for the Lord, and put them in the paper boats, thinking one day He might read them”. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 71)

Joshi’s long spell of stay in the West have not apparently been able to annihilate his roots and the values which permeate his- tolerance, sympathy and love which goes beyond notional boundaries –seem to be flowing in his blood. He exudes distinct Indian philosophical trends, and in an attempt to sound universal, he even echoes his themes in an aesthetically pleasing language with inherent lyricism, myth-imagery and deliberate phraseology. He sincerely tries to experience liberation by broadening his consciousness and converting platonic abstraction embodied in the legendry persons and ideas into concrete. He tries to assimilate various schools of thought vis-à-vis his dilemma into texture of poems that demonstrate cosmic order pervading the man, nature and world. Sri Aurobindo says:

The communion of the human soul with the Divine is becoming once more a subject of thought and utterance, not now limited to the old religious and personal form, but enlightened by a sense of the infinite and Eternal which has arisen from and vivified the large cosmic sense for which thinking and discovery of the last century was training. (Aurobindo 178)

He also wishes to be united with the Supreme soul uniting the material knots:

One day we solve
Our equations of illustration;
Like the pebbles of Galilee-
The Christ, we see God
Manifested in all beings-
We rediscover our identity
In the living Universe-
As we unite with the God. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers in the Dawn 57)

He sees the Ishwara in everything, and it is He who gives life to all things. He is Atma, the self, the Immortal, the Inner Ruler, dwelling in all objects, and there is nothing that can exist apart from him. An Ansha of Him in body of matter is called a Jiva or Jivatma, a separated self. In ‘A Rare Knot of Matter and Spirit’ he says:

Like a fused atom of Helium on the sun

Our life is a rare knot of matter and spirit;

Like the gravitation of the sun,

Which hold revolving planets and their moons together?

Our body and Soul are balanced by the cosmic force. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers in the Dawn 30)

‘Who Conceived This Majestic Beauty’ echoes the cycle of birth and death that makes this universe a continuous exploration spirit in diverse forms. For example, the tree produces a seed, giving its own nature, it drops the seed on the ground, and the seed slowly grows, putting out its hidden powers, until it becomes a tree like its parent. And so with Jiva; like a seed he is dropping into matter by Ishwara, he slowly grows, putting out his hidden powers, until he becomes Ishwara. The Jiva in the plants becomes more conscious of the outer world, feeling the sun, breeze and rain. The poem ‘Human Spirit’ echoes the same idea of birth and rebirth and finally leaving the valleys of joy and sorrow, the soul mirrors the glory of God in the infinite ocean, the Supreme Soul.

The literary sensibility in him has kept a steady gaze on the theme of death. In the images created by him, death is not treated as a stranger but a messenger of God, an honorable guest. The feeling of threat is insecurity, associated with death, is set aside and death is endeared to the life in the fullest exposition of the principle of surrender to death in Indian philosophy. In Hindu scriptures, death is regarded as the gateway to enter a better world in accordance with one’s previous Karmas begotten by deeds. The Bhagvada Geeta teaches the same thing. The Ramayana also preaches the same spiritual and religious tenet. The writers of America i.e. Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, influenced by Hindu thoughts also believed in the same spiritual or divine character of death. Vishnu Joshi regards birth and death as the totally different phenomena:

In this mirrored world,

Birth and death are the same;

In one you become a part and

In the other you become a whole. (Joshi, Echoes of India 9)

At another place, he regards death a biological phenomenon which is just a destruction of body resulting in the painful severance from all ephemeral bonds:

Death

It's a painful transition

Destruction of mortal frame – body. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers in the Dawn 75)

For him, death is the ultimate destination where like a 'homesick bird' soul longs to fly to its nest and offer its 'salutation to Him'. 'The Wedding of Eternity' is an exquisite poem dealing with life and death as complementary to each other. Life in absence of death cannot fulfil its spiritual end howsoever melodious and beautiful it may be:

Your poem "LIFE" sounds more like a melody,
It is beautiful, but she is a spinster,
Not complete, and would not children of her own;
Unless
She is wedded to a bridegroom, who will make her
Mission complete.
Don't panic, I have a matching groom, his name is
DEATH. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 122)

He is not an escapist denying the death reality but accepts it with equal liveliness.

The melodies played by 'Death'
Are more beautiful than all songs of living and non-living
Universe. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 122)

And considers it the incarnation of truth:

Even the most knowledgeable scholar of Vedas would assess
That the melody 'DEATH' is the incarnation of truth. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 123)

He assumes that death ordains completeness and fruition to life. He tries to focus death diabolically exposing the utter helplessness of man before the living form of death. What makes his treatment of death unique is a profound psychological insight, a slowly ascending conflict and above all an intimately felt experience.

The comment, "The obligation of birth and death is a sign that the mental being has not yet unified itself with its true supramental self and spirit, but is dwelling 'in Avidya and enclosed within it' ... After liberation the soul is free, but may still participate in the entire movement and return to birth no longer for its own sake but for the sake of others and according to the will in it of its divine self, the Lord of its movements" by Shri. Aurobindo covers all the aspects of emancipation or Nirvana. Vishnu P. Joshi beholds Nirvana as the final goal of man's life that

cannot be achieved by him only after committing a single act of goodness and spirituality but to attain Nirvana, he has to lead a life as prescribed in Indian scriptures i.e. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagvada Gita and the Vedas:

Meditation or Nirvana-

Not on the soul, body or mind,

Not on the sun, planets or moon,

Let the mind float in the void. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 17)

‘Nirvana’ is a beautiful poem in which the poet ruminating over the charms, purity and holiness expanding all over India, he meditates over all the facets of Nirvana and finds thought as the only turning point either conferring illusion or Nirvana, “The world you are living in is an illusion created by your own thoughts. The truth lies in NIRVANA between birth and death.” (Joshi, Echoes of India 163) This is also stated in Rigveda:

Imam stommhertey jatvedse sthamiv sn mahema maneeshya |

Bhadra hi na pramtirasya sansadhyagne sakhye ma rishama vayam tav || (The Vedic Fire: Rig Veda’, The Secret of the Vedas)

(This is the omniscient who knows the law of our being and is sufficient to his works; let us build the song of his truth by our thought and make it as if a chariot on which he shall mount when he dwells with us, then a happy wisdom becomes ours. With him we cannot come to harm.)

He says, “I perceive thoughts orbit around our souls. Like different chemical elements, we are a product of our thoughts. When the thoughts vanish, each of us would see the same Living Universe- “The God”. (Joshi, Echoes of India Blurb) He questions, “Can we attain NIRVANA by living in this body and enjoying the world with the means we have and by detaching our mind from our past action.” (Joshi, Echoes of India 163) Then he finds, “Yes, death only opens the door to the illumined world and wipes out memory of pain and joy so that eternal software can be reloaded into memory. NIRVANA is truth after which the illusion caused by waking, sleeping, dreaming, death and birth vanishes. (Joshi, Echoes of India 164) The Indian English Literature embodies Indian sensibility and philosophy which have come down to us through the hoary Vedic period. C. R. Reddy aptly remarks:

Indo-Anglian Literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian Literature. It is a part of a modern facet of that glory which commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light, now

with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the intoxicating vicissitudes of time and history. (Kumar 34)

It is also not exaggeration to say that India was created by the Vedas and the Upanishadas and that vision of inspired seers made the people more sensible to the spirituality. That sublime poetry with its revelation of godhead and the joy and power of the life and truth and immortality or its revelation of the secrets of the self and the power of its manifestation in man and the universe and of man's return to self-knowledge got into the very blood and mind and life of race and made itself the fountain head of all that incessant urge to spirituality which has been its distinguishing gift and cultural motive. These Indian scriptures revealing it in forms of noble beauty and grandiose beauty or telling types of character the joy of its forms of life, the significance of its spiritual, ethical and aesthetic ideals, the power and dangers of the human soul. Vishnu P. Joshi breathed the noble ideas of these holy texts while dwelling in India. He has special veneration for these texts and the philosophy of life in his poetry is the very essence of these Indian Hindu scriptures. His poem 'Swallow' can rightly be marked out as summery of the Ramayana in verse and that too in just eleven pages. All the major incidents of the Ramayana are sung by the poet even in dialogue form. The poem obviously reveals the obligations of the relations of husband, wife, brother- in- law and sister- in- law. Mark the reply of Sita, a typical Indian wife who give suitable reply to Ravan when asks her heart:

With Rama and Lakshmana

Happy I was in the forest of Dandaka:

Without Rama, no life I have. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 111)

Ramayana, Sita also utters:

Sun dasmukh! Khadyot prakasha| kabahu ki nalini karai vikasha ||

As man samujhi kahati janki | Khal sudhi nahi raghuveer Banki || (The Ramayana)

In 'In the Tears of An Indian Widow' he has discussed all the Indian mythological figures i.e. Lord Krishna, Kunti, Pandava, Lord Rama, Janak, Sita and Narayana. Focussing on the contemporary incidents in India the poem casts light on the plight of Indian widow where remarriage of a widow is considered social as well as spiritual sin:

Only the selected relatives and

Friends were invited. Vedic hymns were recited by the

Priest and I encircled the sacred fire seven times.

Some unwelcome thing happened. Instead of flowers

Some people pelted stones on our house, because as I a

Widow had remarried. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 103)

Vedas, the sacrificial composition of primitive and still barbarous race written around a system of ceremonial and propitiatory rites, addressed to personified powers of Nature and replete with a confused mass of half-formed myth and crude astronomical allegories yet in the making also form the contents and thoughts of the poetry of Vishnu P. Joshi. Rigveda, the body of sacrificial hymns couched in a very ancient language which presents a number of almost insoluble difficulties, is being revered by the poet as:

Like a mother feeding her child I was offering

The Rigveda Hymn to the father of the Universe-

Brahma, the Creator himself. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 60)

He wishes to meet God but there is no clear way before him. But suddenly, he gets an idea and raises a question about the existence of God and gets an answer:

He and I are not different, In His creation I extend

Therefore, for the well- being of all, I offer this hymn

May all being be satisfied with my offerings.

The birds, trees and animals I heard in my ears,

All were speaking the same hymn of Peace in the Universe. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 60)

Thus, he realized that God is everywhere and said:

I felt His presence, a steady flow of bliss flowing

Through my blood His music ringing deep in my heart;

I thought this must be Brahma. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 60)

In 'He is within You' the poet raises the same question and gets an answer, "He is within you, deep in your heart." (Joshi, Anjali Whispers in the Dawn 42) In 'When the Wave in Our mind faints' he reveals the concealed God in the heart of man whom man never tries to realize:

We build Golden cradles in our house,

Feed our children our wisdom in silver spoons;

Yet, our eyes don't see Him,

The Lord in our heart who is starving. (Joshi, Discover This India Today 24)

But at last, when death comes:

We see Him with our ears,
And we hear him with our eyes.
We see that candle
Which illumined our existence
Has left its shadow behind,
And merged in heaven's light. (Joshi, Discover This India Today 24)

The poet also talks about Brahma in his Poetry. He perceives Brahman comprehensively in both, the stable and the moving. He sees Him in eternal and immutable spirit and in all the changing manifestations of Universe and relativity. He looks Him as that which exceeds, contains and supports all individual things as well as all universe, transcendently of time, space and causality. He considers mind as a faculty of man's anatomy which realized truly- what is God?:

The mind peeps through
The sea of blood vessels
Into the vast nothing,
Questions itself-
Is this life just a dream of flesh and bones? (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 30)

Then the soul speaks:

Open your eyes and ears first and
Listen to the twitter of birds, cry of babies
Starving humans, thirsty trees and animals;
Nurse them to the best of your ability,
Then you may know the door of his kingdom. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 30)

The theme of right and wrong is also well depicted by Vishnu P. Joshi. For him, the right conduct consists of desires, thoughts and actions that help one to tread the Nivratī marg, the path that leads to union. Man must aim at decreasing separateness, at increasing unity; all that lessens separateness, and leads towards unity is right, all the increased separateness leads away from unity are wrong. He sees everywhere a conflict between good and evil thoughts for survival.

The good are supported by our divine nature- the soul,
The evil are supported by the demonic army orbiting our soul

Our actions are whether good or bad are just a by-product of

The two armies devouring each other. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers of the Soul 15)

It is also stated in Manusmriti:

Pravratam Karm sansevy Deva na meti samyatam

Nivrattam save manastu Bhootanyateti Pachvay

(Doing Pravartta Karma man evolves into the condition of Devas. Performing Nivratt he rises to beyond the five Bhootas.)

‘A Song – Life reflects the same thoughts:

There is an ongoing war between good –

And evil thoughts of today

Like soldiers they fight and vanish

In the blood vessels of tomorrow. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers in the Dawn 11)

He feels that in the modern scenario, it is very hard to understand the mystery of God. For realizing God man will have to rebuild himself leaving all impressions related to materialism which have deviated his path to God. He will have to delete all human impressions and ‘rewrite the software on a truly matured mind.’ He says:

Let us not create new hardware to understand God.

Let us use the hardware already available to us.

We may weep as the first-born child

Or we might smile Einstein discovered

Relativity. (Joshi, Discover This India Today 29)

Besides this, the influence of Indian poets and philosophers can also be seen in his poetry. Like R. N. Tagore his poetry is also suffused with humanism. His poems are universal in appeal. They reveal emotions and feelings which are true to all ages and climates. He is a poet of optimism. The world, in spite of evils and difficulties cannot be discarded, but it ought to be made worth living. He envisions a better future for mankind, despite present sorrow and suffering and want of faith in the higher verities and values of life. The main cause of degradation is that most of us ignore the eternal. In ‘Yes, To That Majestic Kingdom Let Us Return’ he wishes to return to the balance between tears and smiles where ‘Souls in different forms- birds, trees, animals and human are not discriminated.’ With this divine form, he wants to be one with God:

Where the soul enlightens

To the brilliance of thousands suns

And sees in it

The living Universe;

Yes, to that majestic kingdom let us return. (Joshi, Anjali Whispers in the Dawn 48)

‘Yes, In That Freedom Let Us Meet’ is also a poem echoing the thoughts and dream of the poet for a free abode of soul:

Where the knowledge

Comes from the very depth of the Universe;

Where the words

Spring from the depth of human souls;

Where all His creations

Stretch their minds to meet perfection;

Yes, in that freedom

Let all of us, young and old march.

Yes, there in that light,

Let our smiles and tears forever meet. (Joshi, Discover This India Today 52)

The poet wishes to be the messenger of Indian culture that is rooted in holy texts of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Upanishada, the Vedas and the Purana. He gives tribute to the great souls such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Princess Diana and Abraham Lincoln, the first President of America. His poetry is full of the majestic and philosophical thoughts depicting the continuous dilemma of nurturing the soul and the body. He is grieved to see the politicians who are dashing the name of Gandhi, Christ and Buddha into dust. His poetic scenes are laid in India where the cultural soil of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati is spreading its ethics and values everywhere. Although, myths play a vital role in Vishnu P. Joshi’s poetry, mainly he broods over Hindu mythology and its teachings. As Vishnu P. Joshi is an Electronic engineer and a Physicist, the impact of his on his poetry exhibits unique mingling of Science and Spiritual sensibilities. The merger of his undiluted Indian sensibility with the mastery of his technique demonstrates Joshi’s admirable poetic capabilities. Although he does not seem to be choosing a particular verse form, the poems differ and organization. Contrasting images and antithesis are used now for movement from thought to another, now to emphasize something in a clever way.

Vishnu P. Joshi has deftly and skilfully nativized English to express Indian culture and spiritual ethos. Simple and common words with suggestive, picturesque and concrete quality create an atmosphere of holiness which runs through the Gita, the Upnishada, the Ramayana, the Mahabharat and the Vedas in his poetry. It reveals the real spirit of Indian thoughts and philosophy. His poetry presents a lofty message- the message of detached and desireless action- for man, caught in the coil of political, social, moral and spiritual crisis.

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