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## **BOOK REVIEW**

Roy, Vijay Kumar. *Contemporary Indian Spiritual Poetry in English: Critical Explorations*, ed. New Delhi: Alfa Publications, 2012. pp. x+226. Price: Rs. 690. HB. ISBN: 978-93-81465-69-1.

Spiritualism is a belief in unseen realities and experiences of the transcendent nature of the world. It gives birth to lofty themes and epic dimensions, which are the major components of touchstone methods for judging the brilliance of poetry laid by great legendary and classical critic Mathew Arnold. Indian English poetry is fortunate in the sense that it has got various connoisseurs who delved deep in spiritual world in the search of the reality of life.

*Contemporary Indian Spiritual Poetry in English: Critical Explorations* is a wide-ranging anthology of the spiritual poetry of contemporary Indian English poets. The anthology covers six Indian English poets, saints and seers including Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das and Paramhansa Yogananda. This is the sixth book edited by Dr Vijay Kumar Roy, a young poet and academic. The book brings together sixteen research papers which are varied in spiritual tone, interesting, representative, and of the highest

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quality. Through this anthology Dr Roy presents the diversity of responses to the theme of spirituality.

The book unfurls with six valuable papers on Rabindranath Tagore, a multifaceted literary genius in the world literary landscape. The anthology has a justified beginning as the first chapter gives in-depth study of the life and literary journey of the great literary soul. The paper successfully establishes Tagore a great bilingual litterateur who sketched brilliantly the vision of life, spirituality and divinity in his poems. Through Tagore's representative work *Gitanjali* the researcher has highlighted the humanitarian approach of spirituality, which favours spiritual freedom. Actually the quest of pure spirituality finds its meaning in the deep religious milieu of Hinduism which is manifestation of the fact that true knowledge is that which perceives the unity of all things in God. The second paper envisages selected poems of Tagore through the mystic eyes. Mysticism has ability to access the reality far beyond. Concentrating on this theory Tagore imbued his poetry with spiritual and mystic vision - he seeks union with God through union with his fellow men – as said by the author of the paper. The third paper is again analytical and comprehensive cram of *Gitanjali*, a collection of devotional lyrics in the light of spiritualism. Influenced from the Vedas and the Upanishads, its beauty lies in Indian spiritual vision, its simplicity and freshness of a folk-song and Tagore's sense of mysticism as revealed in unified principle of unity, rhythm and harmony. The discussion in the paper is really helpful to the readers who are unaware of the spiritual spirit of *Gitanjali*. The title of the fourth paper "Merging 'I' into 'Thee' Reverberations of Bhakti Yoga in *Gitanjali*" is symbolic which deals with deep feeling and reverence for the Almighty who is inseparable from the poet's self. The same issue of spirituality and mysticism has been inferred in different veins with focus on its impeccable contemplations of Bhakti Yoga in its full splendour and grandeur. Bhakti Yoga, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, is a real and genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing and ending in love. The fifth paper discusses spiritual longings in Tagore's poetry. Through the paper the poet's multifaceted vision on spirituality has been vividly exemplified. The sixth paper is highly philosophical and appealing. It propagates the fact that God is the centre of all activities and mankind can be united by the religious bond of love and compassion as conveyed in *Gitanjali*. The spirit of India's inner-seeking spirituality can be found in his poetry — manifestations of the Infinite Spirit in Nature, intimations of the unity of all

things in God, and the liberation of humankind through absolute self-surrender to service and love.

Next four research papers explore the devotional elements in the poetry Swami Vivekananda, a great patriot saint. In this category the first one brings forth the teachings of *jnana yoga* in Vivekananda's poetry. It shows beautifully how his works show the real and meaningful world and existence which is permanent and eternal. The poetry of Vivekananda is imbued with multifaceted hues of the rainbow of *jnana yoga*. The researcher has exploited this fact to make it a strong point of Vivekananda's poetry. The next paper, which continues as a critique on Vivekananda's poetry etches the vision and philosophy of the poet. It takes into account both the original English compositions and translation from Sanskrit or Bengali and winds up with the verity that his poems are the revelation of the divine wisdom of Vedanta and propounds Bhakti, Gyan and Karma Yoga and the ultimate emancipation. The ninth paper not only sketches the life and actions of the illumined soul but also fosters strength to the spiritual messages one gathers irrespective of geographical boundaries. The paper establishes him a great lover of mankind and a valiant monk. The preceding paper on Swami Vivekananda compares him with GM Hopkins who is a poet par excellence in spite of a great religious man. Poetry for Vivekananda is just not for the 'art for art sake' but it is an effective means to share his spiritual realization. The paper boosts his identity both as a spiritual messenger and a great poetic artist.

Then there are three research papers on Sri Aurobindo. The eleventh and the thirteenth paper are touched positively on mystical themes. Mysticism is generally thought of as being of a religious nature, which can be either monistic or theistic. Monistic mysticism seeks unity and identity with a universal principle; while theistic mysticism seeks unity, but not identity, with God. Monistic mysticism can find expression in the concepts of "I am Brahman" and *tat tram asi* (that thou art), meaning that the soul is the eternal and Absolute Being. Both papers with brief discussion on his life and works come hastily to make critical assessment of his long and narrative epic poem *Savitri*, a Magnus opus. Sri Aurobindo defined poetry as 'the mantra of the real.' And every part of *Savitri* is mantra by all means. The twelfth paper is an analysis of spiritual longings of the sonnets of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo as an embodiment of self, who gives liberty to orchestrate the songs of the divine grace is one of the most mesmeric things about his sonnets.

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The anthology comprises two research papers on Sarojini Naidu. Her poetry has been critically examined in the canon of spirituality. In her spiritual poetry she gives a very fine account of the realization of God. Actually they are resplendent with spiritual glory. The fifteenth paper is religious in tone. It is a cheerful account of “Krishna cult in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das”. It is a comparative study in approach and technique. It is all loving that both Naidu and Das seek God to aspire perfection and happiness in life. The discussion of bridal mysticism is the core of the paper.

The last paper is a comparative study of vision and mission of Paramahans Yogananda and the British metaphysical poets. The comparison between the two in the paper is striking and worth observable. Where Yogananda uses the power of God, power of intuition, will power and spiritual power the metaphysical poets, on the other hand, uses the powers like intellectual conceits, emotions and scientific evidences.

Overall the anthology is at its best as it is devoted to providing the history, approach and essence of spiritualism in Indian English poetry, as spiritualism is the core of Indian culture and civilisation.

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