

Poetic Discourse: For Whom the Pen Rolls

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ABSTRACT

This article sets out to discuss the various levels of poetic discourse and important issues concerning the lovers of poetry such as who is the object of poetry, who impacts whom, and whether the poet is a passive conduit of the Muse. For whom the poetry is being written assumes significance in view of the elitist view of poetry as a discipline meant for and enjoyed by the blessed few. This micro-narrative also examines the possible impact of poetry on society and goes on to comment on the prophetic elements in poetry which relate to a larger mass of humanity, rather than to a few studying or discussing literature on coffee tables. The article also aims at discussing such issues as the marginalization of poetry in the annals of modern educational systems and its impact on the growth of the civilization, particularly in view of the impending death of philosophy and this age witnessing no outstanding philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle. The discussion also takes into account as to who is the final arbiter about the interpretation of the poetic discourse.

KEYWORDS: discourse, margins, poetry, Anand, interpretation, Deleuze, romantics, micro-narrative

INTRODUCTION

Every writer at one or the other stage of his writing career encounters these questions: Who is the object of poetry? At whom is literature targeted? Is it meant only for those who can read it? Or for those also who cannot read and write? Was Gorkhy a prophet for only those who could read and analyze Russian literature? Was he not a 'messiah' for the down trodden? What makes a writer a prophet? or a physician for the ills of the world? Is the poet a byproduct of his times? How much impact he has on his times? Who alters whom is the question!

Is the poet really a passive conduit? If he is a man of society, can he be entirely passive? What gives life to a piece of poetry? Words, or the reader, or the moment? Does poetry which is on the reject list of the world stand a fair chance of

survival in this world? These are the issues which challenge the creator and the reader of poetry.

VIEWS AT THE OTHER END:

These questions were set before a cross section of society and I would like to begin with the response of these people who are neither poets, nor philosophers, but still interested in poetry and literary creation.

Mr. Devidasan Chathanadath, who is working as a Senior Executive, at Sriram Group of Institutions, New Delhi, remarks:

“Those who love poetry or for that matter literature in general, I am sure have asked these questions at one point or other in their life. Perhaps

the cyclic nature of the nature affects among other things, poetry as well. Having said this, I am for one who believes that good poetry remains, survives and recited by those who love poetry. Perhaps as you said people are busy with living of life more and perhaps a major lot has become self centered to build that ivory tower you have referred above. I suppose, a poet is a poet though he may be influenced and conditioned by the circumstances and life's experiences, but when it comes to ideation and expressions, every poet is a poet as he thinks similar to other poets because ideas and imagination have no

language, but they speak the same language all over the world by all alike. The power of imagination and the ability to express what he has imagined may differ depending upon "how poetic" and "how able he is" with the language.

People often mistake amassing lots of money as success. It may be because money has such an important place in our society. Similarly, we can see "overflow" of Love, that too the love between a man and a woman in today's poetry. It could be because love between a man and a woman is so intense, many a time it is mistaken for love by a lot

even though, the ambit of love is huge, its canvas is vast and it covers the entire horizons of human emotions as the base emotion. Vedas call Poet as “Kavi” and this Sanskrit word is explained in Vedas as, “One who creates “new things” and not as one who writes “Kavita” or Poetry (not Prose) as it is understood or misunderstood by many. In any case, what I have gathered about the etymology of the word Poet is that this “English” word is originated from the Medieval Latin “Poetria,” from the old Latin “Poeta” which is referred to as “creative literature” in general. In French, it is spelt as “Poete” and there too one

can see the geneses is from Latin word “Poeta.” Ancient Greet called it Poietes” which is equated to “creator, maker, author and poet”. I thought that I may mention this because, there was a post on our Forum which said, “Only poetry from the members would be accepted, other posts would be deleted.” It was perhaps to discourage those who huge matters which do not have “creativity” in them.

Sushrut Badhe, working as a Manager in a firm at Pondichery, India, feels that “A poet is not the creator, but the created. He is nothing more than a PEN - a mere instrument in the hands of a mystic invisible wielder. The true poet owns neither the words nor the impact that the words

create. Every word that is written is pregnant with a meaning that is waiting to be realized. The poet writes not to drain his emotions but rather to drench himself in an ambrosial rain of inspiration that comes from the heavens. The poet writes not to change, not to be heard - but to write. The world dismisses the poet and shows the poet that there is no room for poetic beauty to manifest in a society driven by vain passions. But the poet knows- there is always space because even the very Universe is always expanding. Barbarians and crude minds have since time immemorial dismiss the very existence of poetry but have miserably failed. Poetry will survive in the societal corners today only to flourish tomorrow for the future will be the Age of Poets who shall be the seers, the prophets of a society that has already evolved in consciousness.”

Dr. Maria Miraglia, from Italy, a human rights activist, with her

diverse tastes including being the Chairperson, of World Foundation for Peace, feels that “It isn't easy to answer to this sequence of questions. They have, however, profound reasons and deserve to be analyzed. Who is the object of the poem? It may be the need to express the feelings you have inside, the love for a woman, love for life itself and for the emotions that it arouses. Sure, it is dedicated to those who can read it, but the poem differently from living beings is immortal and remains there for anyone who would, over time, open the pages of a book (computer) and enjoy its beauty, its charm that always creates a bridge between those who wrote it and their readers. As to Gorkhy and the men of his mental and cultural elevation, regardless of the times in which they lived, they leave humanity a unique

heritage of thought of which we can feel enriched . As well as in the medical field: penicillin has saved and will save countless lives Writing for the writer or a poet is a way to confront himself, to put order in his emotions, thoughts and soul. He is not a passive conductor as he lives the same social and personal inputs offered by the life that flows around him: he takes from life and gives life something of himself through his writings What gives poetry life is its truth: there can be no poetry written on request, there wouldn't be no life ..no poetry. When you say that a piece of poetry grows out of itself, of it's verses it is because writing is a bit like going to the psychoanalyst: he makes you dig in and bring out things that were not clear to you.”

These views which are not from experts, but from the other end, from the end where poetry is received, how the reader perceives the poetic creation, and they are interesting because these people do not ascribe to themselves the higher role of being poets or prophets. This is the field where poetry has to meander into, and must make sense to these people. Poetry written for its own sake, or the sake of releasing the pressure off the poet's mind, poetry which does not communicate with the masses, poetry which stays short of turning into a living encounter with the people, poetry which targets the few elite, poetry which remains undecoded, undeciphered, poetry whose language, instead of becoming a bridge between the idea and the receptive mind, draws an iron curtain and blocks the

communication channels, poetry which is written, re-written, and rehearsed to make a sense of out it, on which the author's brand is stamped, is a poetry which is left crippled; its wings shorn, its flight mangled, and is imprisoned on this side of the border; on the side of the poet; whereas the other side, the side of the reader, is denied to it.

Let us begin with the question: Who is being targeted and for whom is the poem written! If poetry is magic, it must have some one to work on. Poetry which does not move beyond the subject is like a sentence without an object, in which action remains restricted to the subject, and has no channel to pass on to the object.

The real problem is : who is at the other end? Whom we perceive

as the reader? Is the poetry to be read by students in the University classes? Or by teachers in their vacant hours? Or is it meant only for University professors? Or, on the other hand, is it to be meant for the ordinary people? Most of the poetry that comes to us down the ages is highly sophisticated, whose meanings cannot be made out without the help of guides, or teachers. Poetry, being a condensed art, further makes it impossible for ordinary intelligence to delve deep into its meaning. Sometimes, poets make the text so allusive and difficult that it turns opaque and the reader leaves it out of fear or disgust. One wonders at the fun of reading classics only in reviews or diluted versions by lesser writers.

Why can't a high class poet write a poem which could be understood by the laity? Poetry has to be targeted at the society, and it must be enabled to communicate directly with the masses, without the help of guides or teachers, with the people of ordinary intelligence, common intelligence, say: a graduate who can make sense out of a sentence. If he can pick the poetic message, then, this poetry is meant for society, and the message can reach a wide audience. But, if very very few elite class people sitting in University departments can make a meaning out of it, then, it definitely loses on its social connectivity, and becomes an isolationist exercise, meant only to please a few. Literature is not meant for the few. It is like water and air which must reach every corner of the society,

and if it is compared to light, how can a major portion of society be consigned to the dark?

The ivory tower approach in case of literary creation is a suicidal passion, which leads directly to the question of the isolation and the alienation of the author. How far is it fair to assume that a poet must remain aloof from society, so that he can contemplate on its evils, and try to make a sense of its problems, and suggest remedies? If a poet is to be considered a man with a mission, or even a prophet, or as we often call him a physician, at the other end lies society without which he has no mission, and nothing to prophesy about, in short, no meaning. It is society, which gives the ultimate value to the ideas of a poet. Isolation is a positive virtue as it affords the

poet time to reflect, but to reflect on what? This 'what' requires a constant communication with the society. What ever a poet writes finds its meaning only in relation to the society outside him. If it has no relation to the society, it is phantasia, a romantic writing, aimed only at killing time, and hence, can not be high on literary value, as it would lack 'high seriousness' which is endemic to great writing. A poet needs to come close to society, and shuttle away from it, in order to take an overall view and then come up with his conclusions. But, if in his isolation, he get alienated from society, his creation loses its social edge, and his work can not be graded anything higher than a selfish pursuit of pleasure. It is really a paradox of literature that even most personal writing does not remain personal.

Once created, it belongs to the general mass of society.

WHO IMPACTS WHOM

This is a major issue concerning literature. It is often said that literature is the mirror of the society. It means that literature is the byproduct of a social system. In other words, it is the society which impacts the creation of literature in a specific period. But it appears to be a half truth only. We have also seen literature affecting the lives of the people and changing them for the better. Going back to Charles Dickens, one finds how his novels effected many changes in the social system. Rousseau and Voltaire spoke of the 'common man' and the society in later generations was to take up their call. Democracy is a

direct fall out of their clarion call: 'Human race is made up of common people, and anything that is not common is hardly worth considering'. It gave a new direction to humanistic thought, which changed the history of mankind, thereafter. In India also, the social currents are amplified in literary texts. Even cinema has been a medium of interaction with society. Sixties and seventies witnessed cinema which concerned itself with social issues and suggested solutions.

Protagonists of Art for Art's Sake do not believe in the dictum that literature has any purpose such as anything called a social purpose which it must subserve. Literature with such a purpose turns into a social propaganda platform, which cuts on the literary value of a work

of art. They wanted art to be neutral, and not imbued with any social thrust. It should cater to the aesthetic sense only, and give joy to man. Art in the pursuit of pleasure is a crude religion. Art, then, is no more than a pill of intoxication, which breaks you off from the reality, for a moment, offers momentary relief, or kicks one might say, and then, man replapses into the quagmire of desperation and frustrations of life. Art, thus, is a temporary relief. And the artist too lives in a make-believe world of his pen, or his brush, and he uses colours and his brush to paint things which suit his designs, which build a comfort zone around him. All these efforts are at best an escape from reality. They find meaning not in their escapism, but in their capacity to relieve human suffering, but if man is torn away from his own

reality, then, these very tendencies build around the artist an illusory world of romance, relapse into which is suicidal for him, because, cutting off the umbilical chord with reality is an unsustainable development, which makes art run counter to the demands of society, and alienates the writer from the very roots he has sprung from.

The question who impacts whom appears to be a ticklish one, and not easy to answer. The writer is a by product of his times, but at the same time, we have seen writers impacting their times. The creator always has more in his mind than the input that he receives from a particular moment. He is not a dead mirror which just projects forth what is happening in society. This is a passive mirror, who has a body, a

translucent shining body, but no soul. However good a face may look, and however shocking may be the wound in the back of a friend, the mirror does not crack into laughter or pain. A creator is not a mirror at all. He is an alarm bird, sitting atop a high pillar, from where he can see what is going on around him, and this is what is feeding him too, but he is blessed that he is a little different from those who are suffering, and those who are causing this suffering, and he starts blurting out at the top of his voice 'injustice' 'injustice' 'injustice'. 'Equality, Liberty, Fraternity' were the words which were articulated by these alarm birds like Rousseau and Voltaire. These words were born out of a death cry from the public against the tyrannies of the kings, and these words also embody the visions of a

new world, which was to grow from the ashes of the previous one. Here we find the artist as an activist of a civilization, who works for its decay and its consequent rebirth. This is how impacting and getting impacted can be brought at the same level. The pen rolls not for the cult of personal pleasure, but for the benefaction of entire human race.

POET AS A PASSIVE CONDUIT

The poets are obsessed with the Muse and the Muse, in turn, blesses them. When the poetic moment is on, the poet has to write on his own palms, if he cannot find paper. In the bus, he writes on the back of bus tickets. I have written on my five fingers, five stanzas of a poem, which I could not alter by

even a word, later on. The poet is a possessed soul at the time of creation, and he does not know what he will write. But one thing is sure, the Muse is a kind goddess and whatever it dictates is in the best interest of society. Poetry, from personal experience, I can say, is like downloading some message on a fax machine, which you cannot alter. All your knowledge and wisdom look askance when the muse is on and the poetry is being downloaded on the paper. The great Gurus on whom now we raise structures of knowledge, were not taught in universities as we are now, but they had an intuition and invisible links with wisdom and whatever they said in their couplets is still unchallenged.

From this, it appears that the poet is a passive conduit, and he

preaches what comes to him from above. Guru Nanak, the great Sikh saint, once said: 'Jaisi mai aaavai khasam ki baaani, taisda Karin bian ve Lalo' [I shall say what ever I am under directions to state from my master]. Now, an easy objection to such a statement is that is the poet a man of dead perceptions. Has he nothing to say of his own? How is it possible that a poet does not know what he will write? It seems scurrilous, if not scandalous. I think that there are two types of poetry. One is the elemental poetry, dealing with the essentials of life, in which prophetic visions are imparted to the poet and he shares it with society. The other kind of poetry is the poetry dealing with our daily living systems and styles in which can be included the ironic pieces like mock epics. These writings relate to life which is

being lived, and this poetry too has been of a very high order. But, in this poetry, poets have written with a conscious mind, an active mind, and with a purpose. Even now, I have seen people writing on various themes like women empowerment, dowry system, social injustice. There is a whole body of literature dealing with revolutions. In such poetry, it is the poet who is the active partner, while the Muse is passive. The writer has his say, he has extra ordinary powers blessed by the Muse which he can use to write momentary poetry, it can raise him in the eyes of history also, and turn him into an immortal, but the real poetry comes to him when he becomes inert and the Muse gets active. This relationship is different in different poets. Keats said: Poetry comes to me as leaves to a plant. When we

work on themes like that, we force the leaves to appear, which is an unnatural activity, fraught with all the attendant consequences, of being second rate etc. The ironic poetry of Pope was aimed at the correction of society. There is a sharp punch in his lines, and he cuts the follies of his times to size. The reader enjoys a good laugh, and then closes the book. And then, closes his mind. But, when one is reading 'Paradise Lost', or even 'Dr. Faustus', can the mind get closed as soon as the book is closed. Are there no lingering questions? This is the difference between the two types of poetry. Most of the English poetry has been written in meter, here again once can see the effect of a conscious effort, which forces the words into patterns, affecting the natural patterns in which they appear. A lengthy

discussion can be raised on this issue. For the present, suffice it to say that poetry is a flowing liquid, and the lesser poetry flows down the drain, while the real and abstract stuff dealing with essentials of living stays back. But, in both cases, the poetic creation rolls out for the good of the human race. The Muse is a benign one, and the poet partakes of her essential nature. Some with their hands, some with their feet, some with their back, and the poet with his pen subserves the human society in which he finds his value not only as a poet, but also as a human being.

WHAT GIVES LIFE TO POETIC CREATION:

While discussing for whom a poet writes, it is also imperative to analyse who is the final arbiter of a

poetic discourse. Again, it appears it is the society. If a literary work is regarded as a classic, it is because it is of lasting value. And this value emanates from its relationship with society. Going a step further, and at the more micro level, it is the reader for whom this entire exercise has taken place. He is the final arbiter of a piece of art.

A poet has written a few words. They are lying dormant in the sleepy pages of the books, till someone opens them and reads them. Wherein lies the life of poetry? In the author, or the reader? Or the time? The life of a creation lies in the mind of the reader. It is the reader who gives life to it. This idea can be further elucidated by a reference to an electric bulb. It is not lighted, but is still live. As soon as the electric

current comes, and it starts burning with light. In the same way, poetic text, though live, keeps dormant in the narrow lanes of writing, and it springs to life at the touch of the reader. It stand up from its beds, and as the reader goes over the text, it comes to life and starts interacting with him. The author is long dead. But his words are now in conversation with the reader. The text is opaque at first, but soon, the reader's inside starts responding to the moods of the text. And soon he understands how it is woven. Then, he imposes on this text, his own views, and interprets it in the way it impacts his mind. His mind which is neither neutral nor passive, but highly active. It is an active involvement in which again a question looms large; who will impact whom. Some times the text is

proven in time, and has the power of a classic. It overtakes the reader and brands itself on his heart. But sometimes, the text is tentative and neutral, and fails to make immediate impact on the heart of the reader. This is the moment when his mind gets started, his own perceptions get into play, and he picks up the text, and throws it into his own mouth, swallows it, and then, says what his system feels. How the text has affected his system which was already affected. This is the tragedy of the text. Every reader approaches it with his own already stuffed mind. He already has pre-formed notions of poetic creation and of the poet. He may have known something about the poet he is looking up to. All these things, including the penchant of the poetry teachers to go into the life of an author, go to cloud the mind of

the reader and distort his perceptive systems. If we want to inhale a tablet, our throat should be clear. We approach the text with a full throat, and are unable to accept any new ideas. So much are the readers involved and obsessed with theory, and isms, that they find it absolutely impossible to approach a work of art without applying some or the other theory to it. No doubt, it can gain us points in debates, but it affects the author's credentials as a free ranter, whatever freedom, under the circumstances, is available to him.

So far as giving life to a poetic creation is concerned, all is not dependent on the reader. Even if he approaches the text with a mind cleared of all ideologies and critical notions, he is circumscribed by time, which turns his effort amorphous and

is brought into the realm of the possible or the virtual.

POETRY AND THE REJECT LIST

The previous discussion has amply focused on the idea that poetic creation is an inspired creation and is meant for the general good of society. But, in our modern times, poetic creation is being pushed into the margins. Earlier civilizations like the Greek are still identified with great philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Rumi, Khalil Gibran, Baba Farid, Guru Nanak, are philosophers with whom civilizations have been identified over the ages. Those were the days when education was the prerogative of the few. But now, as the education scenario is changing, more and more universities are coming into existence. One can witness an

increasing tendency among the people to cut at liberal arts, and push poetry and other disciplines to the periphery, because, they have no practical value. Poetry is an abstract art. And, cannot be converted into hard cash. Commercialisation of education has created a climate in which liberal arts have been pushed into margins, and professional courses have usurped the centre stage.

It can be found that a society is coming up in which the immediate has got precedence over the ultimate. Society is in a value turmoil and in this tussle, the classic is giving way to the ultra-mod, without assessing the cost the society as a whole might have to pay for such a mindless shifting of priorities. Modern society wants to build high rise buildings but

at the same time tries to deny the earth from their foundations. The whole civilization is turning rootless and alien, because, poetry is dying a slow death. Poetry, connected man with the cosmos, thus turning him sacrosanct, and he could feel he was a part of this nature, if not properly an object of it. But, these new systems, have removed our all connections with nature, our sensibilities are becoming synthetic and we are shorn of love for this earth and even for our kith and kin. The present world may have many things to be proud of, its mission to the Mars, its hydrogen bombs, etc. but it is still starved of a Socrates. It is still empty of a Plato. If the drift goes on, in future, there will be no Aristotle to write a sequel on 'The Poetics'.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of foregoing discussion, it can be safely argued that poetic discourse is aimed at society and it must have a fiery edge to enlighten the dark corners of existence. Poetry which subserves the personal alone, or art which does not relate to society, creates a breed of art lovers who are attached to their self, but alienated from society. It is surprising how a tree can flourish, or even enjoy itself on its flowers and fruit, if it takes off its roots from the soil. Only a tree which is standing alone knows what it is to be alone, and away from its kith and kin. Far from being a passive conduit, the poet impacts the society, and in doing so, he emphasizes his flair for transcendence only. So far as giving life to the poetic discourse is concerned, it appears to be an

apparent reality that it owes its origin to the creator, but it comes to life only in interaction with the reader, depending upon who impacts whom, because it has to be both ways. All interpretation of the poetic discourse finally falls into the realm of the

virtual because all the factors that go into its realization are tentative. However, a grave danger lurks behind the veils: Poetry is dying in the scurrilous hurry of our civilization, and the next generations will be devoid philosophers.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POET : DR .J.S. ANAND

Dr. J.S. Anand [b. 1955] is an Indian author who has published 25 books of English poetry, fiction, non-fiction and spirituality. And 7 books of Punjabi poetry. His major works which have created world wide audience are Bliss: The Ultimate Magic, a work of spirituality, which is being translated into Persian by an Iranian Scholar. Another Iranian scholar, Dr. Roghayeh Farsi, his researcher and biographer, has compared Bliss to Khalil Gibran's 'The Prophet' [Research Paper published in Language in India, Sept. 2013]. 'Beyond Life Beyond Death' won acclaim for its post modern thrust, and was compared with T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. [Research paper by Dr. Roghayeh Farsi, pub. In Language in India, June 2013]. A research paper entitled Biotext: A New Perspective has also been published in the same journal [Language in India, Nov. 2013] which is based on the new theory advanced by Dr. J.S. Anand. A Member of a hundred Poetry Societies across the world, Dr. Anand is winner of several awards, notable among them was Dr. M.S. Randhwa Award for his contribution to Art and Culture of Punjab, conferred by Prof. Mohan Singh International Foundation. He is founder co-chairperson of World Foundation for Peace.

Latest Publications: Burning Bright [Poetry] pub. By Poetry society of India]

The Lost Bliss [Poetry] pub. By Poetry Society of India]

Books available at: Poetry Society of India: [www.thepoetrysocietyofindia.com]

Amazon.com/Amazon.in/Createspace.com/justfiction.com

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