

On Place of Poetry in Our lives

[In celebration of 'World Poetry Day' 2017]

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ABSTRACT

The stimulus for writing this article stemmed from my personal love for poetry from the very childhood days, though the author here does not subscribe to the view of any day-and date-specific celebration of any branch of study, especially those which are of abstract in nature, like poetry, music or any other branch whatsoever. For these abstract sources of enjoyment, visual appreciation by the commoners, pose a perplexing problem which we have tried to highlight here in a section. This apart, relevance of poetry in our lives and how the poems affect our cultural existence have also been attempted to be exposed here somewhat succinctly. Besides, through the development of finer senses in our minds cultivation of poetry sharpens our positive feelings and intellect which help us to combat the menaces of fundamentalism of all hues – religious or otherwise.

Key Words: Poetry, world-poetry-day, Visualisation of poetry, Human Culture, world civilization, fundamentalism.

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World poetry day is held on 21 March after UN body UNESCO adopted the date after an agreement in Paris in 1999. UNESCO recognized that poetry can meet a social role as it 'aroused and expresses awareness' of a range of issues. In UK the national poetry day is held on 28 September and a specific theme is chosen; for this year 2017 the subject-matter theme is 'freedom'. Anyway poetry speaks to our 'common humanity and shared values'. UNESCO have chosen three with significant

importance (i) Nikoloz Baratavilli from Georgia. He is regarded as Georgian Byron (He died at the age of 26.) This year (2017) marks his 200th Anniversary. (ii) The second name proposed and selected by UNESCO is of Molla Panah Vagif. This year marks the 300th anniversary of his birth. An Azerbaijani poet, he was the founder of realism genre and was also a popular statesman and diplomat. (iii) The third name of the poet is Sayyid ‘Imad-ad-Din.’ And this year is the 600th anniversary of his death. He was also known as ‘Nasimi’, he lived in 14th century Azerbaijan and Turkey and created most of his work in Arabic. It is believed he was convicted of apostasy and was executed by being skinned alive. His tomb was built in modern day Aleppo of Syria. And that has now turned into a place of pilgrimage [1-3].

On 21 March 1999, Bokova, Director General of UNESCO wrote –“By paying tribute to the men and women whose only instrument is free speech, who imagine and act, UNESCO recognizes in poetry its value as a symbol of the human spirit’s creativity” [4-9].

On world poetry day, this year, 21 March 2017, the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi [10] congratulated the poets all over the world and remarked. “Poetry is at the heart of oral tradition, giving voice to countless people across the world and bringing out their magnificent creativity.[10] In 2016 Bridget Minamore [11], of the Guardian of UK commented that poetry lovers of the world shall have to explore the all possible forms of this very respectable and art form, like dance-drama-and-poetry. And that would enrich and enliven this very vivid medium of expression and its diction.

UNESCO was of the opinion that in today’s strife and terror-ridden world “there are unfulfilled aesthetic needs. Poetry can meet this need if its social role of interpersonal communication is recognized and it continues to be the means of arousing and expressing awareness”.

Besides, it is a social need, which incites young people in particular to return to their roots, and a meaning whereby they can look into themselves at a time when the outside world is irresistibly turning them away from themselves.

Poetry (PO-uh-tree)

From the Greek poiein, means 'to make'. The word suggests that poetry is crafted, and that poets are makers, not just thinkers[12].

Good poetry, like any other well-crafted art form, works in mysterious ways and can leave us feeling battered or light. And though as a genre it is considered far more personal, it can offer pleasure or entertainment, arouse powerful sentiments, make a statement or describe values and tales of heroism as seen from some of the earliest forms of recorded poetry. The Iliad, Odyssey, Ramayana, Beowulf are some examples of early work which talked about the triumph of good over evil, of the 'hero', an embodiment of virtue, who fought anything that harmed society. Of course, each of these works was also very different in many ways, informed as they were by different socio-cultural milieu.

Sometimes all poetry does is leave one feeling exhilarated at how language can entertain and reassure. In an image like "A thousand-limbed million-tongued, multi-spoused Kali on wheels" that Arundhati Subramaniam uses to describe the '5:46 Andheri Local', a lot is being said in very few words. That is where perhaps poetry succeeds-through its ability to evoke powerful response or sentiment through the frugality and novelty of language.

As someone who writes poetry, I am delighted there is a World Poetry Day but I really do not think poetry needs to be saved. A lot of great poetry is being written in many languages all over the world. But we need more; Publishers, avenues and media that take this poetry out to the world.

And we definitely need to change the way young people read and are taught poetry. Most importantly, we need more readers of poetry [13-16].

îî**"How poetry can change lives"**

Poetry is central to our culture and human civilization. And it is the most powerful and transformative agent in the domain of arts. In fact, at the most basic

level poetry- is important because it makes us think, it opens us upto wonder and the sometimes astonishing possibilities of the magical spell of language and its charms and ornamental in speech.

A poet is supposed to be a man or a lady of unusual sensitivity and profound insight. He (she) shall have to be a great imaginative person. These virtues of a poet or a poetess make him or her somewhat different from any ordinary person. A multicoloured arc in the sky is just a rainbow to a commoner but any capable and competent poet has the ability to garner and express his/ her impressions and magnificent feelings in his or her emotional outpouring. The art or skill of writing poems in any particular language or form is a natural gift to any individual. The way a poet idealizes reality and represents his views and visions on what comes to see around.

It is difficult
 To get the news from poems
 Yet men die miserably every day
 For lack
 Of what is found there.

In most cases poetry makes use common currency of our everyday talks. The only difference lies in sequence and order with rhymes or without it. Reading and writing of poetry brings a break in our linear thought processes.

Artists and poets are the raw nerve ends of humanity. By themselves they can do little to save humanity. Without them there would be little worth saving in our life and society.

What is found in the realm of poetry, is what is so often passed over in daily life: the miraculous, the unexpected, the undreamt of. Poems are useful because they honour the unknown, both in us and in the world. The poems are shaped into form by the power and richness of language and set free to fly with wings of images, simile and metaphor. Without the existence of poetry it would appear to be a dead world

with no questions, no wonder, no other possibility. Poetry could be conceived as the phoenix one can fly on to return to that forgotten world of hope, joy and happiness [17-18].

In composition of poems daily social occurrences do matter; they affect our socio-psychic morals. And collectively they offer us emotional yields with surges of creative appeals wherein, magic spell of the words do matter very importantly. For the avid readers of poetry enjoyments do matter. Besides, the totality of the body of poetry with images, simile, metaphors and cadences influence. These features enrich our psyche, pacify our souls, soothe our minds. These are the points we learn from Daisy Fried [19].

Poetry is one of the finest creations of human life and society. Besides,

- (a) Men pick out different objects as beautiful, or pick out different aspects or details of objects already recognised as beautiful, for praise.
- (b) Men not only pick out different objects as beautiful (beauty in nature) but make different beautiful objects (beauty in art) from age to age.
- (c) Usually, however, the objects that earlier generations found or made beautiful, are accepted by later generations as beautiful, and the role of the later generation is that of either adding to them by enriching our perception of them, or subtly modifying our appreciation of their qualities [20].



Visualisation of Poetry through several fine Arts Media

“Poetry thrives on appreciation and gatherings like any other art. We need to do with poetry what Spic Macay has done with music and dance.”

‘Sadho’ is a newly built voluntary Non-Government Organization (NGO) based in Chennai. It hopes to do that quite sincerely from the very outset. “When we said we wanted to do something to bring poetry to the people, someone remarked: that was all

very well but who would be the audience. ‘If no one else it would be the Sadhus’, we said.” And hence the name Sadho.

It has been 10 years now and Ramprakash says Sadho’s Poetry Film Festival is a big draw. It is one of a kind in Asia and they have screened 250 poetry and poetic films from across the world over the five editions they have held. The Sadho team also travels with these films as part of its Travel Festival and has just returned from the Khajuraho Arts Festival. “Khajuraho is the 22nd city we have carried our films to. We showed 21 poetry films over two days.”

Besides films, Sadho wants to focus on poetry albums. “We have already brought out works of Hindi Poet Kunwar Narain and Bengali poet Sankha Ghosh.” There are more poets in the pipeline.

Ramprakash classifies the films. Poetry Films, he says, are where the film is based on a poem or where the central element is a poem; poetic films are poetic in construction and style, and poetry-discourse documentaries raise questions about poetry and life or about an issue. Rather than recommend a favourite, he suggests I watch one of each kind of film.

Shortage of funds is hampering Sadho’s efforts to hold more poetry workshops. According to Ramprakash, “We do have a great team which could do various kinds of workshops but this requires funds and equipment. This is an area we plan to work on in future. We had a very interesting workshop by the Dutch filmmakers Anja Hiddinga and Leendert Pot in Delhi in 2010. It was on sign language and sign-language poetry and films.” [21]

IV

Great Answer to Fundamentalism

The world is now infested with various forms of fundamentalism. We must not mean only Islamic fundamentalism. Fundamentalism of Hindu ilk and Christian shade are outward by less violent but essentially not less corrosive and harmful to mankind.

There is a total refusal among fundamentalists to engage with texts and stories in a contemplative, critical and historical manner. Not only do they want to ban certain texts, but even the ones they accept are reduced to limited, sometimes singular, messages. Secular fundamentalists do this too, as the Communists did with Karl Marx's complex texts in the past, and as neo-liberals are doing today, by reducing even capital to only one of its forms, finance capital [22].

To argue that wealth trickles down is a message that runs contrary to the complexities of economics and experience, just as it is a form of fundamentalism to reduce the state of health of a national economy to basically the indicators of the share market. Social Darwinists reduced and continue to reduce Darwin's complex texts on evolution – and other texts that followed Darwin – in a similar manner.

All fundamentalists – secular or religious – take the complex realities of life and language, and reduce them to a few parameters. They not only ban certain texts, they mostly even confine the 'sanctioned' texts to a single message.

This runs against everything that literature does and that students of literature were trained to do. No significant literary text offers only one message. In that sense, the trend to append simplistic morals to literary works is a serious misreading. Even early religious texts – such as the Indian epics – make full sense only in the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations that they offer. Unfortunately, with the demise of the Arts, this necessary engagement with texts is dying out: even literature is marketed in a singular manner today, reduced to a 'selling point.'

The technocratic nature of today's society is partly to blame. It is not a coincidence that so many of the founders of Hindutva had a technocratic education, as had many European National Socialists, and so many Islamists seem to be technocrats too. Unlike the Arts and pure Science, technology has singular applications. One can use a screwdriver to peel an orange, but it is basically meant to turn a screw. The numerical logic of capitalism – two plus two equals four – has combined with our adoration of technology and its current digital pundits to create fertile grounds for fundamentalism.

The antidote to this trend is not to offer other messages but to learn again how to read – and hence think – with complexity. Facile as it may sound, the best way to counter fundamentalism is to teach our children the skills of literary exegesis.

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"Poetry has vanished as a cultural force in America [and the whole world – the present author]. If poets venture outside their confined world, they can work to make it essential once more."

---- Dana Gioia [23]

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