

Panacea for Bleeding Minds— Moral, Social Values through Poetry

Prof. Dr. K. V. Dominic

Abstract

Poetry is the first genre of literature formulated by the human race and it remains even now as the best form to impart social, moral values to human minds. The merit of poetry over other genres of literature is that a message or value can be instilled with the use minimum words. Even though the reality is so, it is unfortunate that poetry is less appreciated and has lesser number of readers when compared to fiction. The legends and classical writers of all literatures in the world are poets. This paper aims to illustrate how social and moral values can be injected to the minds through poetry. The following issues and values are explicated, analysed and illustrated quoting lines from various poems: The eternal relationship between Man, Nature and God, Co-habitancy on the Planet, problems of the poor, the down-trodden, the marginalized, women and the old, politics, terrorism, patriotism, multiculturalism, sexism, ageism, poverty, need for conservation of nature, spirituality, war and peace, glorification of the services of farmers and soldiers, Isolation and Discard of Parents, etc.

Introduction

Poetry is the first genre of literature formulated by the human race and it remains even now as the best form to impart social, moral values to human minds. Fiction has been dominating English literature and English literature in India since nineteenth century. Poetry and poets have been neglected by both the publishers and the readers. The fact that poets are seers and they convey great values and messages through short pieces of writing is deliberately forgotten and never taken into consideration. In this busy, hustling world where people have little time to spare for reading, where visual media enchant the viewers, what suits them most is short pieces like poems and short stories. This paper aims to illustrate how social and moral values can be injected to the minds through poetry. As a poet I am quoting my own lines to illustrate the issues, values and messages.

Interrelationship of God, Human Being, Other Beings and Nature

Science has proved that our planet earth is 4.543 billion years old and life began 3.5 billion years ago. As per evolution theory the earliest form of man was evolved 66 million years ago. Modern human species or Homo sapiens evolved from their early hominid predecessors between 200,000 and 300,000 years ago and developed a capacity for language about 50,000 years ago. Modern science has clearly established man's relationship with other beings on earth and it is taught in schools as part of the science class. It is an unquestionable reality that all forms of life on earth have equal rights or legitimacy to this planet as humans have. Unlike other beings, man is more selfish, and he is concerned only of his own interests, comforts and pleasures. He is less considerate to his own human fellow beings but least

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compassionate or considerate to other beings who appeared on earth long before him. Let me quote a few lines on it from my masterpiece poem “Write My son, Write”: The poem is in the form of God’s address to the poet.

Write, my son,
write.
Living beings and
lifeless objects
all inter-related.
Your existence
depends on others;
all my creations,
useful and beautiful.
It’s your pettiness,
viewing things
in different ways,
thinking in opposites;
good and bad,
beautiful and ugly.
snakes, worms,
pests, mosquitoes,
ants, lice, beetles,
centipede, millipede,
cockroach, spider--
all for me, good
and beautiful;
but for you,
bad and ugly.
Your selfish mind
tries to ignore
benefits rendered
by these housemates.
.....
Your species
can’t live alone.
Cattle, sheep,
goats, donkeys,
dogs, cats,
swine, fowl,
I created
for your company;
neither can they

exist without you.

.....

Christmas is your
greatest festival;
greeting each other
peace and happiness;
blackest day for
cattle, fowl and fish;
billions butchered
for your pleasure;
you dine and dance,
sing hymns of peace!
preach gospel of love!
Your happy celebrations:
birthday, marriage,
ordination, jubilee,
feasts and festivals,
doomsday for animals.
Their cries resound
like death knell
and thus you try
dissonance at
my harmony (Dominic, "Write My Son, Write," *Write Son, Write* 25-29)

Co-habitancy on the Planet

There are several occasions in our daily life when we feel irritated by the existence of other beings around us. In our intolerance we may drive them away by pelting stones at them, whip them, or even shoot them dead. We never think that they too have equal right to live here and go anywhere they like. In fact only human beings have built walls and boundaries around them and do not allow others to intrude whereas nonhuman beings have no boundary at all on this planet. We have come across cattle on the lanes and roads which block our speedy drive. Here is another poem of mine which deals with this theme. The title of the poem is "A Cow on the Lane". Let me read it:

The train will leave at 5 am;
fifteen minutes remain,
and five more miles to drive.
Lo, a cow lies on the lane;
the horn sounded stormily.
The cow retorted smiling:
"Don't disturb my slumber."
Her posture reminds me

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of Hanuman blocking
the journey of Bhimasena,
seeking kalyanasaugandhika
flower for his Draupadi;
how elder brother Hanuman
pricked his arrogant brother's
bubble of ego and insolence.
“Dear cow, kindly clear the road,”
I pleaded her with folded hands.
“This world is not your grandpa's.
It's so vast and wide.
Can't you take another route?”
What she said is right.
Like Bhimasena, my ego crumbled;
I drove my car backwards;
took another lane and reached
the station just on time. (Dominic, “A Cow on the Lane,” *Write Son, Write* 47-48)

Tribute to Farmers

India is an agricultural country. Agriculture and its allied activities act as main source of livelihood for more than 80% population of rural India. It provides employment to approximately 52% of labour sector. 137 crores of our people are fed by our farmers who constitute 50% of the population. Our rulers, both at the Centre and the States, should see that our farmers' needs and demands should be given top priority than any other section of the society. In reality the farmers are the people who are least considered by the governments. Here is my poem entitled “Salute to the Farmers”:

Farming, noblest of all calling
Most terrestrial and natural
Innocent human beings beckoned
by mother earth to dig out
treasures from her infinite chest
How pleasurable farming is!
Getting up early morning
farmers are allured by plants
just like their own children
Their eyes are bathed in happiness
when they find plants' growth
leaf after leaf and flower after flower
and fruit after fruit getting to ripen
Their eyes are drowned in tears
when they find beloved plants

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withered or dead by bad weather
Farmers, feeders of a nation
less remembered gratefully
or least honoured and rewarded
Always praying for the mercy of God
Risking drought and flood
they have only tales of tears
Outcome of their sweat
looted by the mafias
and they starve and cultivate
to feed the nation's parasites
Numbers of their suicides
increase year after year
Let's salute our farmers for they
are the backbones of our nation (Dominic, "Salute to Farmers," *Contemporary Concerns and Beyond* 9-10)

It is heart-rending news that an average of thirty-three farmers in India commits suicide every day. The National Crime Records Bureau of India reported that a total 296,438 Indian farmers had committed suicide since 1995.

Tribute to Soldiers

Similar to the farmers, a nation should be grateful to its soldiers who protect it. India has a military force of 3.46 million soldiers. Fortunately, the government of India cares for the military force rather satisfactorily with good salary, allowances and pension. But I genuinely doubt if the people of our country are grateful to the services of the soldiers. When we are all sleeping well without any fear, our soldiers are protecting us sleeplessly fighting with the extreme climate at the frontiers. Here is my poem as a Salute to the Soldiers:

Let's salute our soldiers
who protect us from perils
No country can survive
without military defence
Hence soldiers reckoned
precious children of nation
Their lives pledged for the state
Ever ready to sacrifice lives
Proud to be martyrs of the country
Disciplined and systematic life
Honest and highly patriotic
National emotions conquer
domestic attachments

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Extreme weather never
pulls back from duties
Ever vigilant day and night
to make millions of their compatriots
lead happy peaceful life
Hence let's salute our soldiers
who serve as our saviours (Dominic, "Salute to Soldiers," *Contemporary Concerns and Beyond* 56)

Cry against War

When we think of soldiers there arises a question. Is military force necessary for a nation? The answer is there in my poem "Martyrs at the Borders":

How much of a country's revenue
allotted for its defence every year!
Total money spent on defence
can wipe out poverty from the planet for ever
Is human species so belligerent and destructive?
Aren't the masses peace lovers,
benevolent and compassionate?
Why then such a huge waste
for defence unnecessary?
Why create tension at the borders?
A means to divert subjects' attention
and muffle mass' protest against corruption? (Dominic, "Martyrs at the Borders,"
Multicultural Symphony 66)

Need for Multicultural Harmony

As I have stated earlier, only human beings create walls and borders around them. All other beings have liberty to move anywhere, seek food anywhere, live anywhere and there is no threat for them from other beings except from human beings. Let me quote from my poem "Multicultural Harmony":

Dear my fellow beings
break away all fences and walls
Fences of your petty minds
Compound walls of your houses
Walls of your religions and castes
Boundaries of your native States
And ultimately borders of your nations
Let there be no India, Pakistan or China
America, Africa, Europe or Australia

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But only one nation THE WORLD
where every being lives in perfect harmony
as one entity in multicultural world (Dominic, “Multicultural Harmony,” *Multicultural Symphony* 22-23)

Gender Discrimination

Another serious issue I would like to present before you is gender discrimination. Compared to the West, discrimination shown to women is at a very high rate in our country. Let me quote from my poem “Women Denied Justice”:

Fifty percent of my compatriots are women
Women Reservation Bill still in freezer
Bill demands only thirty three percent in Lok Sabha
and all legislative assemblies of the States
Patriarchy plays its regular villainous role
Women’s reservation only twelve percent
in this largest democracy of world
Neighbouring Islam country
Bangladesh has twenty percent
Pakistan too twenty percent
Even Taliban has twenty-eight
Asian countries total is eighteen
And India has only thirteenth place
Europe reserves twenty-four
Whereas African country Rwanda sixty-three (Dominic, “Women Denied Justice,” *Contemporary Concerns and Beyond* 55)

Violence against Women

India is considered to be the world’s most dangerous country for sexual violence against women. Rape is one of the most common crimes in India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, one woman is raped every 20 minutes in India. In India, marital rape is not a criminal offense. India is one of the fifty countries that have not yet outlawed marital rape. 20% of Indian men admit to forcing their wives or partners to have sex. 38% of Indian men admit they have physically abused their partners.

Poverty in the World

Poverty is a major issue the world has to find solution. Some 795 million people in the world do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. That's about one in nine people on earth. The vast majority of the world's hungry people live in developing countries, where 12.9 percent of the population is undernourished. Asia is the continent with the hungriest people - two thirds of the total. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest *prevalence* of hunger. One person in four there is undernourished. Poor nutrition

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causes 45% of deaths in children under five, that is, 3.1 million children each year. Let me read a few lines from my poem “African Poverty”:

Use of modern science in agriculture
made revolution in production of food
World now produces food materials
suffice to feed entire human race
And seventeen percent surplus than needs
Yet four African nations--South Sudan,
Somalia, Yemen and Nigeria die of poverty
Another fifteen countries face food crisis
Millions of starving people—children, women
old stretch their hands with begging bowls
for remnants of other peoples’ food
Adding oil to their hellish life civil war
and terrorism extinguish their ray of hope
How can the rich and rich countries
waste their excess food
when their wretched siblings
cry for just a meal a day?
When will the rich have prick of conscience
for hoarding poor’s share and wealth
and starving them to die? (Dominic, “African Poverty,” *Cataracts of Compassion* 26)

Problems of the Old

Unlike the family relationships in the West, children are too dependent of the parents in our country. The parents sacrifice their lives for rearing the children, giving them best education, seeking employment for them, getting them married, settle them with their families, look after the grandchildren and thus their responsibilities continue till their old age and bedridden. Very often their selfless services or *niskama karma* are ignored by their children. Here is my poem titled “Old Age” which depicts the problems of old age:

Human life is a cycle:
born to the earth
with a shrieking cry;
life’s first breath.
Bed-ridden first year,
dependent childhood,
independent youth;
gives birth to children;
health wanes;

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dependent old age;
body weak;
but mind strong;
bed-ridden at last;
lies back to the earth
with a painful breath.
Childhood is memorable—
carefree and dynamic
no sorrow dares
but happiness glares.
one with Nature;
an angel on earth;
daring to all.
Old age begins to play its colours—
The monarch of yesterday,
feels humbled today.
Imprisoned amidst unripe ripeness;
utterly helpless.
unyielding mind.
The dearest children
to whom he/she looked and loved
turn ungrateful.
They hate and curse
And never care.
Ageism is contemptible;
unpardonable too.
Today's torturer
tomorrow's victim;
we live with ironies. (Dominic, "Old Age," *Winged Reason* 51-52)

Ageism, Isolation and Discard of Parents

In place of joint families, we have nuclear families now and it creates a lot of domestic and social problems. In most of the houses, parents have only one, two or maximum three children. Parents give them good education spending a lot of money and the children are compelled to seek employment abroad or in cities far away from their houses. Children are married and their families also accompany them leaving their old parents in their houses with either servants to assist them or without any servants. My poem "Gayatri's Solitude" portrays the harsh reality of such parents:

Gayatri aged eighty-two,
widowed at thirty-five,
mother of five children:

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three sons and two daughters;
all in the States.
Old-age home her haven.
The palatial house
her children built
remains empty at town.
Her room in old-age home
modern with AC.
She will get any food;
all left to her choice.
Her children under illusion:
their mother is cozy.
Poor, miserable mother,
she has no hunger,
she has no sleep.
An old lily flower,
pale and faded.
Dawn to dusk,
sitting in an armchair,
looking at the far West,
longing for her children's calls,
she remains in solitude.
How lucky were her parents!
Lived happy, died happy;
always with their children:
sons, daughters,
daughters-in-law,
sons-in-law,
a dozen grandchildren,
a house full of mirth.
The depth of maternal love,
and the pangs of separation
no child can gauge. (Dominic, "Gayatri's Solitude," *Winged Reason* 31-32)

Some children are so cruel that they take their bedridden parents as burden and desert them. Kindly listen to my poem about the cruelty of deserting the parents. The title of the poem is "Parents Deserted".

Stunned by reports in newspapers
Parents in eighties and nineties
needing bed rest and medication
admitted in hospitals by children

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When asked to pay medicine bills
 desert them and disappear for ever
 Some are dropped on roadsides
 Some even in thick forests
 lonesome and prey for wild animals
 How can offspring be so ungrateful!
 Bore them for nine months in womb
 Breastfed for a year or more
 Turned blood to sweat and even starving
 nurtured with food, clothes and education
 Sought hard for their employment
 Found suitable partners for their marriage
 Looked after their tots
 when they went for work
 Old and weak when such parents
 need support from their children
 how can they be treated as burden?
 How can they be spat out like curry leaves?
 Deserting them is like selling cattle
 when they are old and useless
 to the slaughterhouses of Kerala
 Beware! Life is a vicious cycle
 Today's children tomorrow's parents! (Dominic, "Parents Deserted," *K. V. Dominic Essential Readings & Study Guide* 239)

Terrorism

Terrorism is an aching issue the world fails to find a solution. Very smart and intelligent youth are brain-washed, and they fall into the trap of the terrorists who believe in violence, bloodshed and anarchy. Here is my poem on this issue. The title of the poem is "From Lamb to Wolf".

How happy and jolly was the house when he was born!
 Waves of merriment flowed to roofs and echoed
 Birds and animals welcomed him
 with hilarious twitters, bleats and moos
 Stars and planets showered him all blessings
 He was as charming as the rising sun
 His first birthday was festivity for the entire village
 Just as a lamb he played with domestic animals
 Eyeing him was an experience of bliss
 He was extra smart and intelligent at school and college
 He was darling of all—Hindus, Muslims, Christians,

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low caste, high caste, rich and poor
Was a wonder to teachers who foresaw him as scientist
Won M Tech with first rank from IIT
Offers of high pay jobs came from different firms
Alas, immersing all in seas of tears
he absconded one night with little trace to follow
Phoned his mother a week after, announcing that
he prefers to serve God than human beings
And he would never come back home
Learnt that he was enchanted by terrorists
Two months later came the saddest news
He was bombed and killed at the battlefield
His house became hell of wails and mourns
Birds and animals made doleful cries

Isn't service to man service to God?
Isn't service to animals and plants service unto Him?
Doesn't God the Father love all His children—
humans, nonhumans, plants and
universe with discrimination to none?
How can God, epitome of love, be pleased
by violence and bloodshed in His name? (Dominic, "From Lamb to Wolf," *Cataracts of
Compassion* 36-37)

We hear of Maoist attacks in several parts of our country. However reasonable are their arguments for such attacks, there is no justification in their killing of the innocents. Here is my poem titled "Train Blast" based on a historical massacre:

Train blasted;
More than a hundred died;
All innocents;
Set out for
nearby destinations;
Ended at
eternal terminus.
Another heinous act
of Maoists.
End justifies means;
Misquote Marx
Lenin, Mao.
Utopian ends;
Diabolic means.

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Are their hearts
made of stone?
Have their tears
dried in the furnace
of spite?
Have they plugged
their ears
with their
victims' bones?
Heart-rending
is the wail
of that grandma:
"Krishna,
Why did you
call back
all my children?
What have they done?
Or their wives
and their children?
Couldn't you take
me also with them?
Krishna,
why are you
so indifferent?
Can't you punish
these terrorists
as you punished
Asuras?
Or at least
curse them
as you cursed
Ashwatthama? (Dominic, "Train Blast," *Write Son*, *Write* 85-86)

Conclusion

I am winding up my paper, reiterating the fact that poetry is the best means to impart values and messages to the people, particularly to the young minds that are groping in darkness.

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Biodata of the Resource Person



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