
LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 14:6 June 2014

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

C. Subburaman, Ph.D. (Economics)

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

Instant Poetry: Poetic Genius versus Poetic Talent

Dr. J. S. Anand, Ph.D.

What Goes into the Writing of Poetry?

This article is concerned with the fact how much effort goes into the writing of poetry. Is it a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, or is there more to it than merely a representation of human emotions? Another issue related to this idea is the mental labour that becomes a part of intellectual poetry in the case of some eminent poets like T.S. Eliot, who used to polish their poems, and get them further polished by more eminent friends in the field, like Ezra Pound. Great Indian Modern Poet Rabindranath Tagore also wrote and rewrote the same poem before presenting the final version. This article also intends to explore the frontiers of poetry: as to whether it is *inspired*, or it is a political document, or can we say: *conspired*, that is to say:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Instant Poetry: Poetic Genius versus Poetic Talent

Dr. J. S. Anand, Ph.D.

poetry or poeticizing. Another eminent issue under discussion is about poetry and its rhyme. Difficulty in poetic expression or its transparency also forms the basis of this article.

Inspired or Conspired?

The most important question is whether poetry is inspired or conspired. In other words, is poet an 'inspired fool' or he is an intelligent tool? In my opinion, if poetry could be like other arts, anybody could have learned this art and there would have been poets after poets. There is some deep relationship between poetry and the prophet. Some souls are specifically blessed, just us when we dig the ground, in some places we get sweet water, in other places, it is unfit for drinking, and in still other places, there is no water at all. Same is the condition with poetry. It is a flood with some people while others belong to the poetic desert.

Decorating and Adorning with Themes

Moreover, when the poetic instinct is on, the poet becomes helpless, like the wedding guest in Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner', and he has to blurt out the truth. However conscious the person might be, words, phrases, sentences appear from nowhere and he is only to pick up the logs and build the house. Some people, however, start decorating it and lending them some themes. This is where art comes in.

What Is Art?

Art means something added, something artificial, something extra, which is not intrinsic to an object, something coming from the instinct of a man to look charming, to appear something different, and to appeal. Thus, art is nearer to artificiality, superficiality, torn away from intrinsic meaning of an object, but still, giving due regard to the artist, art adds value to the objects.

Inspired Poet

A poet who is inspired would write the poem as it comes, and it determines its own form, and its meaning as well. One wonders, how much inspiration had gone into Milton's *Paradise Lost* and why poets like Pope and Dryden could not match him in their creations? In the modern world, we know how people start gathering at cities, turning them into megacities, and metropolis, because of the facilities available there. Similar is the case of some poets and writers,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Instant Poetry: Poetic Genius versus Poetic Talent

Dr. J. S. Anand, Ph.D.

who wrote so much, and in so many varieties, on so many issues. Think of Shakespeare. He was a mega city of literature. But all this happens, when somebody is specifically blessed. Poetry is an art which cannot be cultivated. It is an inborn blessing, and poets who try to practise this art, can never write poetry, they only *poeticise*.

Place of Rhyming

Rhyming is often considered to be symptomatic to poetic creation. People can be seen playing with words, to create rhymes. By doing so, we can give movement to the words, but not the essential flow that comes from above. Think of Pope and Dryden. There is some dryness in their poetry.

Context and Times

Politics dims the glow of a poetic creation. It turns it superficial. Although a poet is rooted in his contemporaneity, he may or may not express any political stance; he still remains a part of that historical moment. But when a poet tries to bring that political aspect into his poetry, not only it becomes dated, it also loses on its essential glow.

Varying Effects

A poet like Dryden may be able to dazzle you with his words, and their arrangement, so that we may be able to say: “Poetry is best words in best arrangement”, still they lack the grandeur which attends Milton’s poetry. This grandeur is embedded in the poetry of Shakespeare, Donne, Wordsworth and Coleridge too. And this is missing from the politicalized poetry of modern times, where poets are used to write on various themes. Essays and articles can be written on various themes, and hypothesis can be proved or disproved. But, such a thing in poetry is unpardonable.

Poets are More Prophetic

Writers are called prophets, but poets are more prophetic than others, because, poetry is the foremost form of literary creation, and all other forms are late arrivals. Prophets are seers, so are poets, and this capability, or this blessed state comes to them, not from any knowledge, any

scientifically attained degree from a University. It comes to them, all of a sudden, based on their experience of life, not only of this life, but their previous lives.

Moreover, the poet, in the moments of his creation, is close to the creator, and whatever he speaks, is the voice of God. Poets utter truths beyond the powers of ordinary people, or even ordinary writers, who gather pebbles from the shores.

Poetic Creation: Its Transparency versus Its Opacity

I wonder for whom literature is being created. Is it of the poet, by the poet, for the poet? Is it for the select few? Is it for intellectuals alone? Is it only for research in universities? Literature is meant for the common man, and if he cannot approach a work of art without iron gloves, for whom is its message meant?

I have found poetic creations which cannot be deciphered by ordinary intelligence. Poets, to impress upon the reader, their high intellectuality, or even, sometimes, because they are well-read, cannot help themselves, from using their high stance, which ordinary readers fail to get at. I may refer to T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. While the students of English literature bow before the great man, for his scholarship, depth, and breadth of view, and this book was a landmark, which changed the course of literary history, still, one question remains to be answered for posterity. How many people read it from the original text, and how many could get at its meaning without the help of their teachers or help books?

The allusions have made the book quite rich in its meaning, but a man of ordinary intelligence has to take tuition with a teacher, to understand his book. Whether it was a deliberate effort to equate literature with life which too was so complex and distorted in 'his' modern times, is another thing. But, if it was difficult for students of English literature, it was simply too much for an ordinary reader. Thus, all the hype about its greatness has been created by the students of English literature, while the ordinary student has remained untouched by its magic. He has read 'about' it only. Even the students of post graduate classes read from help books about this work.

Conscious Effort to Turn the Work of Art More Sophisticated

My concern about difficulty relates to such an effort, a conscious effort, by the writer, to turn a work of art, so sophisticated that no doubt it conveys a magical meaning, but the meaning becomes oblivion for the greater part of readership. Had it been rendered in an easy language it [the language] might have become a bridge between the reader and the writer's message. And a whole generation could have read the charming poetry of T.S. Eliot. But he stands as a lighthouse. And commenting on him sometimes feels like committing a sacrilege. So great he was in his passion. But, fact is a fact. I, as a student of literature, had to read help books, what he wanted to say, because even our teachers could not help in bringing his meaning home to us.

Inspired Poetry Flows into the Hearts of Readers

The argument that I am advancing here is that poetry which is inspired must directly flow into the heart of the reader and like a tablet gulped with water, show its effect directly. It should not need any help books. Its language has to be simple although it might carry a very complex thought.

Here, our friends appear to falter, because toughness and difficulty are not essentially emblematic of high quality. They sometimes are the result of a poet's wrangling with meaning, and all the confusing symbols and signals in poetry further confuse the readers, leading them nowhere.

How Does a Reader Interpret Poetry?

How the reader interprets Poetry is another question. Poetry is actually words, which fall into the consciousness of the reader which is like a lake. They cause ripples at the surface, and also stir his deeper inside. All depends upon the quality of that lake water - its depth, its breadth, etc. In other words, the meaning of a text depends on the literary culture and breadth of view and depth of experience of the reader. Moreover, the words once shot, take up an independent entity of their own, and cannot be forced into pre-fabricated intentions. The reader is independent of them, as much as the words, once uttered, are independent of the poet.

Where Do Poets Begin?

I wonder when writing poetry, do poets write a title first, and then start writing poetry. It is a mathematical way to prove or disprove a certain hypothesis. Moreover, no poet can decide before writing a poem, what he will write in it. If there is anyone who can tell us what he is going to write, and how he will write it, he is a prose writer, because, poetic creation is a live creation. Once you start on the journey, it takes its own curvaceous route. Words come. Turns come. Idea follows idea and you don't know where you end up. And, then, what you have written, then, only then, you can give it a title. Prior titling of poems is an anachronism.

Forced Rhyming Is Tortured Prose

In the same breath, I would like to say that rhyming, if it comes naturally as in a song, is welcome. But forced rhyming is like writing tortured prose. It looks like poetry. At the most, it can be called poeticizing. But, poetry is an entirely different experience. It is a release from a passion divine. And the important thing is that you have no control over your words, over the images, over the sentences, they go on forming themselves in an instant rush. Poetry, which does not come instantly, is not divine, nor inspired. Poetry which is later on polished, and embellished to give a better look, sometimes, turns into base material, which only dazzles, whereas the crux gets lost in the effort.

A Lyrical Dialogue

Poetry, I have already said, is a lyrical dialogue with the cosmos. Its subjects are elevated. And its treatment too is elevated. Poet is not an inspired fool, he is a prophet charged with a mission. Through him, the cosmos speaks to the laity.



Dr. J. S. Anand, Ph.D., Principal, DAV College, Bathinda 151001 Panjab, India
anandjs55@yahoo.com, www.drjsanand.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Instant Poetry: Poetic Genius versus Poetic Talent

Dr. J. S. Anand, Ph.D.