

Subashitha Sahitya

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Abstract

Sahitya in the written form, began its decline with our adaptation of the term literature during the British occupation. If we use the term Sahitya in its original concept then we do not even need to add Subashitha, because Sahitya is always well spoken, well written and well presented. What we need today is not war literature, but anti-war novels and anti-war poetry. The heroes in our Sahitya should be people who prevented a war or a genocide, people who united a country, instead of murdering each other to divide a country. Our partition literature should be about the humane incidents, how people risked their own lives to save others. Dalit literature should be all Sahitya works on all suppressed and oppressed people on earth, and they should be about the non-Dalit people who are doing their best to help the Dalits to seek emancipation. If we are to bring peace and harmony among mankind, then our Sahitya should be about acceptance of the Others, instead of hating them or just tolerating them. Before greed and envy took over, human beings would have been essentially peaceful, like all other animal beings. There would have been no violence. Today we have to talk about non-violence because we do not have a word in any language for the absence of violence. Let us write for peace, for Mother Earth, for happiness for all living beings.

Keywords: Sahitya, peace, non-violence, rightful words

Subashitha Sahitya

We should have continued to use the term Sahitya, instead of adopting the term Literature. Sahitya in the written form, began its decline with our adaptation of the term literature during the British occupation.

We have corrupted the concept of Sahitya as literature to mean just the novel, and on occasion the short story and the poem. Because we want to ape the west in everything, we grabbed at their word literature, and translated it as Sahitya, degrading the entire concept, like we adopted good morning or good evening instead of Vanakkam, Namasthe or Namaskar, or in Sri Lanka, Ayubowan.

It is not easy to trace when the term literature had been used in place of Sahitya. But as far back as 1893 they had the Bengal Academy of Literature which was later changed to 'Bangiya Sahitya Parishad'. The Sanskrit term, in its most basic sense, signifies an 'association,' 'connection,' 'society,' 'combination,' or 'union'."

In Hindi, the term Sahitya came to include "prose, verse, poetry, plays, novels, champu, history, biography, satire, comedy, humor, human interest, ancient history, science, handicrafts, the arts, and as many other topics", wrote Shrinarayan Chaturvedi in Sarasvati journal (1961). However

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Shamsunar Das, even in 1901, used the term 'bhandar' instead of 'Sahitya' to mean 'gadya' and 'padya'. Das did not include poetry, novels and plays under Sahitya. But for writings in English he began to use the term Sahitya.

P. Sachidanandan in 'What is Sahit in Sahitya' gives us Sahit as the root word of Sahitya. Sahitya means "to be together; joining together various dharmas in one deed; participation of a large number of people on equal basis in one act; a kind of kavya." 'Kavya' has been proposed as a better term for literature

Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, when he was editor of Sarasvati, carried a cartoon 'Sahitya samachar' (literary news). One cartoon (January 1904), shows three men, one of them, Marathi Sahitya is in search of his turban, English Sahitya is in search of his coat, and Bengali Sahitya for his scarf, watch and handkerchief. All three are complaining that the items are missing or stolen. In the next page the cartoon continues, with a fourth man, Hindi Sahitya, wearing the stolen turban, coat, scarf, handkerchief and watch. He says "...how quickly I have brought about my own progress! This is the science that I have learned at the great university in Paris!!!...The guardian of 'The Times' and 'The Globe' will pardon me and serve as my fortress."

This cartoon perhaps illustrates the fate of all 'Sahitya' in our countries, producing 'Shaitya Chori', who the west now calls plagiarists.

In our country, the The Sahitya Mandala Act (No. 31 of 1958), also deals only with 'literature' and 'literary works' "including bibliographies, dictionaries, encyclopedias and other works of reference". We too have adapted the more recent idea of Sahitya as it is found in India. The Sahitya Akademi of India had been formed in 1954, "for the development of Indian letters...for literary dialogue, publication and promotion of literary activities in all Indian languages and English".

Literature in the west has come to mean only imaginative or fictional writing, which is just one river flowing into the ocean of Sahitya. Sachidanandan mentions a response by Mahasveta Devi, when someone asked about bringing Adivasis into the mainstream, "Are you asking me to bring the ocean into a canal?". That is what we are doing when we try to restrict Sahitya to a stream, serving only a limited group.

In the same manner that the flow of a river could be controlled, guided or restricted, diverted and even polluted, the Sahitya restricted to literature could be treated in the same manner.

Morality got trampled to death, when literature became a commodity. It happened long before the development of the printing press and the paperback. Writers sold their conscience to the royalty, for a pot of gold or a plot of land. The same fate befell our great dramatic creations when the idiot box invaded our world.

In the beginning creative art forms would have evolved to release a creative urge, and then such art forms would have been appreciated by others, which may later on have led to developing such arts into a form of innocent, pure entertainment. It could also have been a means of transferring knowledge and experience. There would not have been any ulterior motives of material benefits or dominance.

Two and a half millennia ago, Buddha had described the evils of commercialized entertainment. "In the past, when beings are not free from lust, from hate, from delusion, who are bound by the bondage of lust, of hate, of delusion, a dancer on stage or in a show would entertain them with lustful hateful delusive themes arousing greater lust greater hate greater delusion. Thus, being intoxicated and heedless himself, he intoxicates others and makes them heedless" Talaputta Sutta. Samutta Nikaya 42.2

Again in the Talaputa Sutra we find, "Any beings who are not devoid of passion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of passion, focus with even more passion on things inspiring passion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of aversion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of aversion, focus with even more aversion on things inspiring aversion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival. Any beings who are not devoid of delusion to begin with, who are bound by the bond of delusion, focus with even more delusion on things inspiring delusion presented by an actor on stage in the midst of a festival." (Thanissaro Bhikku translation)

If we use the term Sahitya in its original concept then we do not even need to add Subashitha, because Sahitya is always well spoken, well written and well presented.

In the Subhasitha Sutta (Samyutta Nikaya), "Speak only the speech that neither torments self nor does harm to others. That speech is truly well spoken. Speak only endearing speech, speech that is welcomed. Speech when it brings no evil to others is pleasant. Truth, indeed, is deathless speech: This is an ancient principle."

In a debate with the asura king, Sakka the deva-king was victorious through what was well spoken." Subhasita-jaya Sutta, Sanyutta Nikaya 11.1.5

Peace and War

What we need is peace on earth, peace among all life on earth. Yet what we have today, and probably what we had throughout human history has been either war or absence of war. Man is the only violent animal on earth. All other animal beings show only aggression, when they are hungry or when threatened. They are neither greedy nor jealous.

Our earliest expressions would have been oral, and we have no way of learning the creative poems, stories, or songs in pre-historic times. We have paintings from a later stage, paintings depicting past happenings, messages and probably artistic creations too. One very important fact is

that archaeologist Prof. Raj Somadeva who did a detailed study of Sri Lanka rock paintings had not found a single hunting scene or any violence among these paintings. That is prehistoric Subhashitha Sahitya.

By the time writing progressed from trade records to creative work man had already become greedy for wealth and power, and they needed subordinates and followers to fight, invade, grab and possess. We don't grow up even as we grow old. We still behave like children who fight over, "our school is better than yours", "my father is richer than yours" "my country is better than yours", my language is superior to yours".

All the evil deeds of greedy power hungry people were written about as heroics, poetry was in their praise. Always the victor was the hero, who was always in the right. The defeated was the villain. Mahabharatha and the Iliad became great literary works, as did some versions of the Ramayana. There has always been violence, murder, torture and destruction. Churchill got the Nobel for literature, for his "History of the World", the man responsible for the death of 3.5 million in the 1943 Bengal famine. Siegfried Siwertz of the Swedish Academy called him "a Caesar who also has the gift of Cicero's pen". Fredrich Engels called Cicero "the most contemptible scoundrel in history". If Hitler had won the war, he would have got the Nobel award for his Mein Kampf.

What we need today is not war literature, but anti-war sahitya. The heroes in our Sahitya should be people who prevented a war or a genocide, people who united a country, instead of murdering each other to divide a country. We should read Vimala Suri's "Paumacharya", or the Dasaratha Jataka, instead of Valmiki's Ramayana, We should read the Gita According to Gandhi. We should read 'First Blood' instead of watching Rambo. We could have respected Prof. David Morrel as a great anti-war writer if he had continued as a teacher of creative English literature, who could empathize with the Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD than as a writer of violent stories for cheap films.

There are two good anti-war novels published in Sri Lanka about the ethnic war, Ayathurai Santhan's "Rails Run Parallel" and "Every Journey Ends".

Violence

In the beginning there would have been only peace and harmony and loving kindness towards all life. There would have been no violence. Today violence has become so natural among mankind we do not even have a proper word for nonviolence in our literature. Mahatma Gandhi too had to use A-himsa because he did not have a positive word. What we call literature is greatly responsible for this calamity. Not only did we forget the word for absence of violence but have failed to create a new word. Perhaps we should adopt a word.

We have a word from South Africa - 'Ubuntu' - which is a Nguni Bantu term for human kindness, humaneness, virtue. It gave rise to Ubuntuism. In Malawi the term used is uMunthu. Epilogue of the Interim Constitution of South Africa (1993) states, "there is a need for

understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization".

Confucius saw it as Ren or Jen in the Anglicized form. Which has been explained as "not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself".

I believe that violence evolved before what the Europeans call 'religions'. That could be the reason for all these major religions had to preach against violence, because by then violence was already with mankind. By religions we have to mean the revealed religions or the Abrahamic religions and also the Eastern philosophies, which the Europeans tried to group along with their religions. Like we do not have words in our languages for words like, 'nation', 'God' or 'religion', the Europeans do not have words for 'dhamma', 'deva' or 'nirvana'.

That is probably why Jesus had to say, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Luke 6:27 - 28. In the Holy Quran, we find - (5:8) Don't hate other people. Treat everyone fairly. "Let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly." The Prophet said, "God grants to *rifq* (gentleness) what he does not grant to *unf* (violence)." (Sunah Abu Dawud 4/255)

Buddha and Mahavir had always preached peace and non-violence. Even the Vedic writings before them. "May we not hate anyone." Atharva Veda 12/1/24. "He who sees all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings, hates none". Isopanishad 6.

Those who were hungry for power and wealth, began to create conflicts. Religious conflicts are the result of the intolerance bred by man's psychological insecurity and his fanatical attachment to the symbols of his religion. This fanaticism he mistakes for the religion itself, and which, because they are exclusive to his own religious culture, he looks upon as superior.

"We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to love one another." said Jonathan Swift.¹

Gautam Sen quotes Swami Vivekananda, "It is a significant fact that all religions, without exception, hold that man is a degeneration of what he was, whether they cloth this in mythological words, or in the clear language of philosophy, or in the beautiful expressions of poetry. This is the kernel of truth within the story of Adam's fall in the Jewish scripture. This is again and again repeated in the scriptures of the Hindus: the dream of a period which they call the Age of Truth, when no man died unless he wished to die. There was no evil and the present age is a corruption of that state of perfection. Patently, man's fall is the consequence of his ignorant use of his free will. Man is not bound by the shackles of a morbid and merciless Dictator, but by the fetters of his own indulgence."²

¹ Thoughts of Various Subjects.

² Sen, Gautam. The Mind of Swami Vivekananda. 1975. p. 43

Man is exposed to too much violence in all the media and most of the literature today, and that is what makes man to become more violent, and also become immune to acts of violence, why people cannot empathize or at least sympathize with the victims of violence.

Partition literature over the years has always been, what I would like to call Durbashitha Literature. A real Subhashitha Sahitya would have been about the good things that happened at the time. About how the victims were cared for, how they were protected by people at risk to their own lives. Our memories should be of such humane deeds, which could strengthen the bonds of humanity. Our attempts today should be for reconciliation, to revive old friendships, to kindle new friendships, to create trust.

Our partition literature is all about hatred and violence, like it is with the holocaust, Jallianwala Bagh or the Ethnic war in Sri Lanka. Most of the victims and the victimisers are all dead, or very old. By continuing all the violent literature and films, we continue to add fuel to the fires, to keep the hatred alive, to turn the victims into victimisers turn by turn. It is happening now in the Rakhine State, spreading into Bangladesh, India, Thailand, and even Sri Lanka. It has been happening ever since the creation of the state of Israel.

If we are to write about such tragedies, it should be about the humane incidents, how people risked their own lives to save others, how people tried to prevent the violence then and how they are trying to create a society where such incidents never occur again.

*Na hi verena verani
sammantidha kudacanam
averena ca sammanti
esa dhammo sanantano.*

Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving-kindness. This is an ancient law. (Dhammapada verse 5)

J. R. Jayawardene, the former president of Sri Lanka, had quoted this verse, in 1951 in San Francisco, on behalf of Japan, at the signing of the Peace Treaty. Let us use our writing to solve our problems, our conflicts by loving-kindness.

Dalit Literature

Since around late 19th century, we have what has been called as Dalit Literature, to give a label to the Sahitya works by a certain community in India, who had been given names like Harijan, by Mahatma Gandhi, and Scheduled Castes by the government.

Dalit literature should be all Sahitya works on all suppressed and oppressed people on earth,

and they should also be about the non-Dalit people who are doing their best to help the Dalits to seek emancipation.

Dalit from Sanskrit, means downtrodden, suppressed, crushed. The use of the word has been traced back to Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, born in Maharashtra to a family of the 'Mali' caste, was the first Hindu to have started an orphanage for outcast children. He established a school for girls, and in 1873 formed the 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' (Society of Seekers of Truth). He started a movement against caste-restrictions in India in 1848, when he was only 21 years old. Probably Jyotirao Phule realized that it was only through education, that the downtrodden could raise their heads, to get out of the quagmire. It is the opportunity for education that produced Ambedkars, Gondanes, Iliahs, Modis and Narayanans in India.

What is required is to provide literacy to the Untouchables, and education to the Touchables, who need to learn a little biology, that Homo sapiens is one species, that there are no subspecies, and also a little morality and humility.

In India, instead of calling themselves Dalits, 'Scheduled castes' or 'Untouchables', let the writers begin to use terms like non-Dalits, 'Unscheduled Castes' and 'Touchables' to identify their oppressors. We also need writers who are now in prominent positions in politics, state administration or academic institutions, to motivate the youth who are now seeking higher education, that they need to survive, somehow, the way they had survived through their school days. They owe it to their families, who would be placing all their hopes on the youth to come through the universities and raise all of them out of the quagmire. The youth also owe it to all the Dalits around the world to prove that they are equal, and sometimes better than the 'more equal' people of the world. When Maheswata Devi wrote about Chuni Kotal, she could have highlighted the disappointment and the pain of Chuni's family and her husband. The media too should have highlighted the selfish attempt by Senthilkumar, Vemula, Bhim Singh and all the others to escape alone, leaving all their loved ones to suffer the consequences of their failure.

It is time now for the Indian Untouchables to give up identifying themselves as Dalits, or even as subalterns, and for the Indian government to do away with the labels, SC, ST, OBC, but only as human beings, Homo sapiens sapiens. Let me quote a line from Manohar Mouli Biswas, "Now it sometimes occurs to me that we were the children of the sun - the infinite power of the sun was present in us and we lived on the strength of that infinite power" May they continue to have the strength of the infinite power.

Terrorism

It had taken 152 years for the sale of two million copies of 'A tale of Two Cities', while J. R. R. Tolkein's 'The Lord of the Rings' needed only 57 years to reach the 150 million sale, and 'Da Vinci Code' sold 80 million in 8 years. When the novel and the film have become a commodity, the businessman takes over, and he wants to get the highest sale and highest profits in the shortest time. He encourages the writers to write such books full of violence and erotic fantasies, and the readers

get addicted, thus creating a vicious circle, from which we would never be able to break out.

The violent novel could give ideas to terrorists. One instance is the suicide bomber. Craig Thomas in his 1976 novel 'Rat Trap' mentions a woman who explodes herself inside a packed dance floor during World War II. The 'Last Jihad' by Joel Rosenberg was on the New York Times best seller list for 11 weeks, because it was a story of a hijacked jet on a suicide attack on the President's motorcade. But this book was written 9 months before 9/11. Tom Clancy's 'Debt Of Honor', which had a vengeful man planning to fly a plane into Capitol Hill, was published 9 years earlier. Stephen Leather's thriller 'Soft Target', about a plot to explode bombs in the London Underground was published five months before the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks.

Boyd Tonkin, writing to The Independent, shortly after 9/11, mentioned the back cover of a comedy thriller stating, "Terrorism, it is the new rock n' roll", that it is a tale of "serial murder, mass slaughter and professional assassination", "and a bigger body count than ever before". Boyd Tonkin said, "that whatever human beings can imagine, they will in due time perform - only far more destructively." The initiative is taken by the writers. Tonkin ends his essay "Humanistic piety pretends that great art alone has special gifts of prophecy. Just at the moment, it looks as though the trash will always have the final word."

But what he considers as trash has always hit the best seller lists and always sold millions of copies and will continue to sell. "The terrorist novel feeds off the glow of the violence it condemns, and in effect turns actual terrorists into advanced publicists " said Benjamin Kunkel, co-editor of the literary journal 'n+1'.

Today there are terrorists, and novelists who write on Terrorism themes and also Terrorism experts working with or for U.S. type terrorocracies. They have been called terrorologists by Alexander George. In a way the terrorist, the novelist and the terrorologist think almost alike, in their planning, gathering of technical details, sourcing funds and carrying out the crime. The only difference, often but not always, is that in the novels, the terrorist fails in the end, and the terrorologist also tries to prevent the terrorist from succeeding. But here again, the anti-terrorist, or the state controlled terrorists win, and an oft repeated comment in most of these terrorist fiction is that the terrorist claims his opponent to be no different from him. They both kill. One in the name of freedom or whatever the cause they are fighting for. The other in the name of patriotism or loyalty or just for the money dished out by autocrats.

Yet we also get the occasional anti-terrorist novel, "Shahid's Widow" written by a former Israel military officer, Danny Bar, which we should all read to try to understand the desperate situation of the suicide cadre, and those who manipulate them.

When we look at crime novels too, the novelist has to think like a criminal to be able to write a successful suspense novel. The writer has to plan the murder, or the robbery, in the same way the criminal would, and perhaps such novels and films could have inspired criminals for their

planning, and to avoid the mistakes made by the fictional criminals. It is the same with pornography. It is the deviant mind of the writer who describes all the erotic stories, sometimes trying to hide themselves behind the cover of a literary creation.

Pornography

When writers and producers took to providing cheap entertainment to their readers and their audience, to cater to their sexual desires, producing erotica, the next inevitable step was sexual violence. Reading about sexual deviations, sadomasochism and watching them on screen creates temptation which could be one of the reasons for the increase in such forms of violence in our society today. The mass media who report such incidents in graphic detail could also be contributing to such an increase in sexual violence. Violent computer games played by children could make them immune to violence. All this has increased the threshold of tolerance for violence and would continue to increase if we do not control ourselves. Media today continue to rape the victims over and over again till they could find the next victim.

Pornography is a controversial issue. When the Europeans invaded India, they looked at several sites as sex temples, as pure pornography. Some called it "The birthplace of porn". Even today the tourist industry exploits them as pure pornography, but available uncensored. Then Khajuraho is pure pornography for those who seek them for such sexual excitement. Till recent times, no one in India had considered them as obscene, because they are religious spaces, which had been built by the Chandela kings between the 9th to 11th centuries, with some of the most exquisite sculptures created by man and dedicated to Indian gods, and influenced by Tantric philosophy.

Even Mahatma Gandhi, the great man he was, erred about the temples at Khajuraho. He wanted them destroyed. He is reported as saying, "These temples will show the whole world that we are not moral people, that we are not puritans." That is why Claude Markovits wrote in 'Un-Gandhian Gandhi', "he (Gandhi) was a Victorian intellectual rather than an anglicized one, and he himself did not realize to what extent, intellectually, he was a product of the Victorian era". (p.130).

Fortunately for the art lovers of the world, the Mahatma was prevented from finishing what the Muslim invaders did a few centuries earlier, when they destroyed about 75 of the Khajuraho temples. It was Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore who had opposed this idea and saved the temples.

True Art is not pornography and Pornography is not art. All pornography is vile, not just the 'blue' videos and under-the-counter porn magazines, but even what the male intellectuals used to give a more 'respectable' term, 'erotica'. All porn is about violation of the human body and mind, and men who created them originally targeted the female, but unfortunately now the female of the species too has entered the market, producing cheap porn targeting other weak minded females and a few men.

Perhaps man had misinterpreted the divine command, in the same way some Buddhists have misinterpreted the Five Precepts, by reading the Third precept in isolation. *Kamesu micchacara*

veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami: "I observe the precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct." The word *kama* is always taken as sexual desire, while it means sensual desire. If we take all Five Precepts together, as long as we show loving kindness to all life, do not take what does not belong to us, do not hurt or abuse any one by thought or deed, then there would be no need to impose any sexual mores or commandments, and there would never be any need for pornography or sexual violence.

It is the suppression of the sex urge which would have opened the door for prostitution, after the freedom enjoyed by the men in ancient India or Greece. Roger Just (*Women in Athenian Land and Life*) quotes from the Greek orator Demosthenes "We have *hetairai* (prostitutes) for pleasure, *pallakai* (concubines) for our daily bodily needs, and *gynaikes* (wives) to bear us legitimate children and to be the faithful guardians of our households". It is such androcentric attitudes of the human male which continues sexual and physical harassment of the female.

When man became more puritan, prostitution developed its own stigma, and visiting a prostitute was sometimes very difficult in a close knit family or in a village. Pornography would have been the next marketable product for the entrepreneur, because it could be sold and purchased more surreptitiously than buying sex with a woman. Every development in printing and digital technology made the distribution easier and easier, and today any young child could access it on his computer or even his mobile phone or at unscrupulous internet cafes.

Pornography makes the woman a sex object, a 'thing' which could be used or abused. According to Richard Brodie "... men get quickly aroused by visual stimuli, which is why today pornography is much more popular with men than with women." Brodie argues that it was "evolutionarily important" for the male to pass on his DNA.

Violent literature and pornography could be one reason for the spread of all forms of violence, political, religious, domestic, and sexual. The word we could use is Durbashitha literature. Instead what we need is real Subhashitha literature and other creative arts. We need to do away with all forms of pornographic literature, sexual, violent, social and economic.

It would be up to the experts to study the possibility of a terrorist turning novelist or a novelist turning terrorist, or a pervert becoming a novelist or a novelist becoming a pervert, if their roles had changed, if their background and opportunities had changed. There was a time, even after printing technology made major advances, distribution and sharing of written material was limited geographically, financially and politically. Yet today through cyberspace and digital technology any writing could spread around the world an airborne virus, giving us the term something has gone viral. An enterprising writer could infect the minds of the entire human race writing a few minutes, for the good or for evil.

Many people in South Asia still seems to believe there are some human beings who were not included among *Sabbe Satta* or *Lokah Samastha*.

This year too many great children of Mother India received the Padma Shri Awards last month. Let us write about such wonderful selfless human beings, instead murderers, thieves, child molesters, directly using force or fraud, or indirectly by using evil, durbashitha words.

Let us keep that in mind. Every time we use our pen or our fingers, that our words could change the world. As writers, let us incite people towards peace and harmony. As critics, let us seek Subhashitha Sahitya in all the writings from around the world. Let us pick the grain from the chaff. Then like Ashoka raja inscribed 2300 years ago, once again people would be able to mingle with the gods, pure in heart and mind.

May all beings live in peace and happiness.