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EDITORIAL: POETRY SECTION

A Thousand Unspoken Verses

It has been four long years of my intense association with poetry. To some, it might sound less, for haven't we been living and breathing poems since our very childhood? Well, factually considered, it is true. However, when I look back and try to think of a time I developed passionate attachment towards this very fine art (and craft), I cannot seem to go back to school days. The reason for this is quite simple, really. I had a bunch of fabulous English language teachers, but I was never told to own the poems I was reading. It was someone else's verse, to be interpreted in complicated words emanating from someone else's thought. I was, but, a receptacle of what 'they' necessitated I must see in-between lines; I could never become my own crucible of bubbling associations and disagreements with the poet's thought.

And this is not how poetry works, I later realized.

Today, I stand at a junction, where I am a 'freelance' teacher (as if there were such a thing), teaching everything post the period of Romanticism to young students, and especially those who are not pursuing liberal arts. I firmly believe that diving deep into poetry stands to benefit them more than those who are already deep inside the world of subjective thought. I am also leading from the fore a bunch of at least 50-60 odd Delhi based individuals, who are deeply, passionately in love with poetry; both as a writer and listener. I am also curating discussions, experiences, soirees, which I am convinced will lead to a greater absorption of the inherent wonders of this form of art.

What changed, you might ask. Let me take the route of descriptive prose to reveal my journey through the poetic domain.

It was a humid afternoon of July 7th, when 9 people including me, some friends, others soon to be friends, gathered in the N-Block CCD, in Connaught Place. Reason? We wanted to share poems. Actually, 'they' wanted to share poems; I wasn't interested in either reading or writing them. I had just been dragged into the set up as a co-host, and had no idea what to expect. The greatest motivation to drag myself out on a Sunday to do this was the hope of meeting some great people.

The 9 got together, a round of introductions was conducted, some humour was passed around on a plate, and then began the first poem of the day. It was comic poem in colloquial Hindi through which the poet had commented on his own, rather 'round' shape. I remember laughing so hard that I had tears in my eyes. And after we had laughed enough, the poet, in the last line, exhorted us to look beyond the shape, for there is more in him that meets the eye. And while I couldn't stop laughing, I remember having been touched somewhere very deep, almost magically so. And the relationship I built with words then has continued with vigour till date, and I know it will go on.

Poetry is personal. It is many other things, but from my vantage point, it is personal – an alternate voice which reveals just a bit of the tune of a person's entire song of beliefs and existence. Over the past many years, I have conducted hundreds of soirees, each more magnificent than the last. My own poetry club, Poets' Collective, has drawn in a very high number of poets from Delhi-NCR (and beyond) who have revealed to us the might of their pen, and the rawness of their heart. They have told us their stories in bits and pieces, and there have been occasions when, if you take up five to six of their pieces for

perusal together, you're able to figure out how their wheel of their life and mind is turning. These simple poets, some skilled with enormous talent, some others climbing just the first step onto their arty journey, trust us with their most private emotions, throbbing out in their verses. Sure, there is great poetry which has already happened, via Shakespeare and Pope and Keats and Eliot. But there are a thousand unspoken great poems which lie within all hearts. At the risk of being beaten black and blue, I would like to share, I believe all of us are poets. I don't wish to add a prefix of value judgement to these nascent, latent poets. I just mean to say that they exist. And while many were left hidden or suffocated in the pages of history, in our times of burgeoning social engagement, a lot of these poets are finding an outlet or a forum to cultivate their kind of audience.

Poetry is meant to be heard, not just read. I welcome conflicts on this thought, but there is immense beauty in the rhythmic notes, alliterative words and sonorously placed lines, which is missed if a person forgets to chant along. Reading poetry is a meditative, personal activity, true, but it is also a community experience of collective gasps, sighs, laughter and tears. And nowhere is this truer than in the culture of spoken word. The hinterlands of Uttar Pradesh has been, since a long time, organizing 'sammelans' and 'mushairas', in which eminent locally recognized poets participate

and enthrall listeners for hours. Some of these mushairas are several decades old in traditions.

A couple of years ago, Delhi (and later, other metropolitan cities) witnessed the mushrooming of many little clubs and organizations, which began taking a leaf out of the tradition of poetic soirees and tweaked it to suit the modern poet and listener. Some stuck to a particular language, others opened doors to all; some experimented with specific genres, others remained agnostic; some swam in orthodox schools of structures, others vehemently took up tabooed subjects as the primary driving force. A crazy storm of words had taken birth, and it was spreading around to cafes, monuments and college campuses. As an art form, I'm sure, poetry never occupied a seat as prominent and privileged as this.

Not all poets write to be heard. For some, it is a compulsive need to allow their internal churns to manifest as words. For so many of us, writing poems is not a choice. It has to happen, sometimes in the middle of ungodly hours of night, other times in between challenging office works. With easy access android writing pads in our hands, we are writing in metros, in buses, on the footpath, in malls, and also, of course, in created, curated, comfortable environs of our homes. The

passion is such, that I have seen some young poets also plan vacations to specifically throw themselves in the lap of nature so deeply buried verses may emerge. I count all of these are great signs for poetry, even as pessimists cry out 'dilution'. Good literature finds a way to be on the shelf for long enough; that doesn't mean the not-so-good stop dead in its tracks.

In the latest edition of the journal, we've given a very simple, non-judgement space to every quill that had potential. My journey with Lapis Lazuli has begun, and over time, I am sure we will travel from potential to finesse. For now, revel in the attempts of these young poets, who have had the bravery share their wordplay with the Editors. Many a times, this is the very step at which compelling voices lose the battle with themselves. A thousand unspoken verses shall find their way into the forthcoming editions of this journal. For now, we've taken the first step!

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