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Writing Versus Reading

Geetashree Chatterjee

I do not know whether I should be writing this short essay. For some it may appear to be “Vanity Fair”. To me, it is important in the sense that each issue I take up here to discuss threadbare has the scope of being topic of generic discourse in so far as writing or reading is concerned. The only hesitation on my part to talk about these is on account that I have quoted liberally from my book of short stories “A Basketful of Lies” which has been recently published by Creative Crows.

At the outset, let me express my heartfelt gratitude to all my friends and well-wishers for the rave reviews that this book has garnered. However, my critics, or should I say evaluators, have also pinpointed certain aspects in my writing, while discussing or writing about the book, which I myself need to sort out.

The first one of these is about the language used to narrate the short stories. Interestingly, two very divergent sets of views have emerged on this. One which has endorsed the richness and lyrical quality of expressions, turns of phrases used, way the words have been played with and so on and so forth, the other view is that today’s (non) readers actually look for simpler construction of sentences. If you ask me, literary value of a book, well-nigh rests upon the kind of language that has been used therein. (Here I also place a heavy weight on editing). To me reading pleasure heightens if the language is vivid, vibrant, visual and wisely employed. I say employ because, having said all that of the above, language is an instrument in the narrative. Being an instrument it needs to be skilfully deployed to underscore the ethos of the matrix. I have given in to poetic expressions to deal with memories and nostalgia like in *The Old Book Shop* where an old man grapples with his ancientness viz. a viz. today’s fast changing world of machination. I have also been very liberal with lingual craft where the characters are embroiled in situations so complex that words become a limitation to describe the relational intricacies. I quote the story “When It Is Too Dark” where to get into the mind of a melancholic has not been easy. Again, the backdrop of the narrative assumes utmost significance when it comes to usefulness of language. In *Amaresh*, the acrimonious conjugal disharmony does not leave any scope for cadence while *Maamone* ensconced on the fulcrum of a transitional society opens up a wide canvas to evoke eloquent images. Thus, in the final analysis, language is just a tool to be used in the manner as and when required. To narrow it down to a certain specific style is like clipping the wings of a bird in flight.

Coming to the second most crucial observation - the repetitive narration in first person in the book. Let me be very honest, I feel immensely comfortable writing in first person because then I become the character itself. Here, my role as a narrator may be misconstrued as in a first person narrative the author gets ample leeway to inexcusably encroach into the narrative. My point here is that narration in first person does not necessarily mean the presence of the author in the story. “I” can be one of the characters as well. In “When It Is Too Dark”, given the storyline, it was essential that the narrative be in first person because the entire plot was weaved around the psychosis of a suicidal protagonist. In *Amaresh*, the I is a spectator of the drama that unfurls in the life of the pivotal character. In *Virgin White* the I is a ruthless, overambitious small townner for

whom the end justifies the means. In “My “Twilight” Friend” the I is a teenager who undergoes a series of surreal experiences of meeting a vampire in the Metro! So it boils down that the presence of I in a story does not essentially mean the presence of the writer. Likewise, even the readers, while reading, have to distinguish between the I as a character and the I as a narrator in a story. However, there are many short stories written in first person by many other writers where they are very much present in their own skin.

Next would be the interplay of silences which is inarguably the highlight in my narrations and deliberately so. The idea is to leave immense scope for personal interpretation of the reader. However, sadly speaking, I notice for many reading is just reading. And unless and until everything is written down in black and white the stories are unpardonably inconclusive and incomplete. Food for thought I must say! For me, when the writer is not present while a reader reads him, a plane of virtual interaction should build up between them wherein the reader ought to exert to figure out what exactly was there in the writer’s mind when he or she was penning down the story. Alas! It is not always happening in the contemporary reading world. Gaps and abruptness in narratives are taken as shortcomings of the writer and not avenues of mind application for the reader. Here, to some extent lack of imagination is also to be blamed. Reading is just not an ophthalmic exercise, it should also provide that intellectual stimulus which sets in motion the flight of fancy!!

Last but not the least, the indulgence of the stories in hopeless situations. Hopeless? But I have only presented narratives which may be a wee bit different than what one would like to fancy for. The stories twirl at unexpected junctures but not always swing towards the darker side. A depressive woman mustering all her diminutive strength to pull on with life without props, a shaken husband trying his level best to make up with his truant wife, an amnesiac wife realizing that her loving husband is also capable of her murder, a betrayed lover who finds solace in alcohol – yes these are twisted tales and so is life.

To summarize, this piece is not an exercise in self-justification. What I intend to underline is that writing is a craft. (And not the simplistically mistaken fancies of a dreamer). So is reading a skill. To hone the craft of writing, one needs to sharpen the implements, experiment with the ingredients and innovate with the garnishes. To hone the skill of reading, one has to let free your imagination and think out of the box, if I may be allowed to say so.

A writer may have a very unusual perspective on an issue. The reader has to discern, if not appreciate, this approach. Of course, he is free to criticise and evaluate. At the same time, if a reader picks up a book with pre-decided expectations, the reader-writer equation gets automatically tarnished. If they are able to bond through the book the intersection of minds is complete – a rewarding experience for both.

BIO-NOTE

Geetashree Chatterjee belongs to the Corporate World with more than thirty years of experience. She has felt the need for creative ventilation throughout her working life. She got published and shared word space with stalwarts in prestigious anthologies like *The Dance Of The Peacock*, edited by Dr. Vivekananda Jha and *Suvarnarekha*, edited by Dr. Nandini Sahu. Her poems and other writings have also been published in prestigious e-zines like *Muse India*, *induswomanwriting.com*, *Contemporary Literary Review India (CLRI)* and print publication like *Phenomenal Literature*. Her solo collection of short stories named “A Basketful Of Lies” has got published in 2018. She also blogs, reviews books and films and promotes meaningful literature. She was also instrumental in arranging the first haiku workshop in Delhi which was conducted by the internationally acclaimed haiku poet Ms. Kala Ramesh. The workshop led to the formation of the inHaiku NCR chapter of very enthusiastic haiku poets based in the NCR.

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