

My World, My Writing

By Binayak Banerjee (India)

Poetry, to me, is a continuous struggle to bridge the sense of materialistic cosmopolitan presence with the realm of emotional privacy. Now, this privacy must be balanced by an interest in the people around me. Otherwise, a state of anxiety might creep in. And we all know that in a state of anxiety, we can't stand closeness and want to attenuate this feeling by opening up and stripping away bodily impediments so that the anxiety can be relieved in some way. But why do we try to get rid of it? Is it because anxiety tries to get rid of everything materialistic? Across this bridge between anxiety and material existence, we are likely to arrive at a spiritual emptiness.

This emptiness may or may not be cloaked in a romantic glow. It can be perfect, or it can be improvised. But one thing is certain: this emptiness is carried within itself like trees carry the fire that turns them into ashes. Thus, construction and deconstruction move at the same pace, and poetry, like life itself, concentrates and dilutes and then concentrates again, while emptiness becomes a symbol of change and resistance to change.

Is this a contradiction? Oh yes! Contradiction is the essence of life, and life churns out poetry. The poem that throbs inside the poet's heart may or may not be the same one he puts down on paper. As soon as the child grows up, the dream evaporates. There is very little that we can do to change the course of reality.

It is here that poetry becomes part of us. Poems, to me, are not just powerful words or emotions recollected in tranquility. They are a purposeful, imaginative distance between the world and its inhabitants, between the poet and his reader, between you and me. Since proximity blurs vision, even a little distance can open up our hearts and bring back our focus. We can wake up to the fact that two people living in the same room can be unfamiliar with each other, while the light of a dimmed candle can merge seamlessly with the wakeful stars of the night. A lonely soul bends over a laptop, while a solitary kite finds another kite amidst the clouds.

These images are not to deny that life is a battle. There are hurdles; some smaller and some larger. But we must learn to grow with them; and that's the real triumph! It's not so important to win as it is to fall down and pick yourself up and carry on. Yes, that's tough! Life often behaves like a machine that shapes us into its mold. But poetry would not accept that pre-depicted shape or fall prey to the mechanizations of a system working against it. Rather, it would bring out individuality so that one can stand tall in a dwarfed world. It would highlight that the only possible dignity of man lies in his power to deliberately choose certain moral values by which he can live. Snatching eternity from these desperately fleeting moments can be the great magic trick of human existence. And when we play this trick, we find ourselves in a race against time to wage a war against the system, against the hackneyed ideas that drain us of our strengths. This war has to be fought with new ideas; ideas that will allow us to expand within our sphere. That expansion is poetry. It frees us over and over again, telling us that time is running out and we still have not made love with our souls.

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Now, love is like a fire. It burns everything. It disfigures everything. Sometimes, we cannot even understand this cruelty. Because when my beloved cuts through me, I feel assured that it hurts her too, because of her love. One is willing to forgo the encroachment of space for love, even when he is being taken for granted. Poetry creates that space in love. It turns a relationship into a kaleidoscope, colorful and beautiful, where a slight movement changes a design only to form another equally beautiful one.

That is why we are incomplete without poetry. That void within us which increases with every passing day tells us that moving on does not necessarily mean moving up. Our life becomes a routine where we find ourselves getting stuck. The main portion of our mind is occupied and exploited by the outside world. Without being actively conscious of it, we follow events in the Middle East, China, the US and so forth. Our awareness gets overwhelmed, and we feel suffocated by it. And when we accept suffocation calmly, we try to deceive ourselves. We start believing that hypocrisy is not such a bad thing. It is just multiplying one's personality. We go on believing this until we drown in it.

Poetry is the path out of this quagmire, the courage to defeat our nemesis; something that grows inside us only when we can feel its presence.

This path is not easy. Danger follows a true poet like a loyal puppy. Still, we have to find our way through this minefield. And though relationships here are more transient than a ship passing in the night, permanence is nothing more than waking up, smiling, and smelling the coffee. Yet we must have the confidence that there is a world waiting for us out there.

This reconstruction of reality is poetry. There are times when we feel that we are nothing more than a shadow. But then again, that gust of air, that divine light, travels through our entire being and cleanses our soul. Suddenly, the emptiness is replaced by something so sublime that we once again begin to trust our faith in goodness. We realize that we now possess the elixir of our lives.