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Why I Write What I Write and How I Write It

The title of this panel sounds like some questionnaire that we used to answer while studying in 5th or 6th grade and I wish I could go back to that time to answer these questions, because as we grow up, it becomes more difficult to face these three words: “why,” “what” and “how.” And believe me, these are the toughest tricks, and they can bring a writer down. But, nevertheless, writers always carry their very own tricks to counter things like this and I am here to do so.

The first question, as you can see is ‘why I write’. When I considered this for the first time, it appeared as a purely literary question. But later on, as I tried to explain the answer to myself, it seemed a biological question to me. Although we must firstly learn why we breathe, eat and sleep, the next query must be why we write. I believe to all the writers who do their job seriously, writing is as spontaneous as breathing, eating or sleeping. The one line answer could be this: “I write because I cannot live without writing,” and that would be true enough, but not long enough to satisfy a panel. Therefore, I have divided my answer to this question into three separate parts, each of which relates to three different time periods of my life lived so far.

My first reason is related entirely with expression—self expression. Let me explain this. I was born in a family which carries the rich tradition of Indian classical music. It was my grandfather who took performing Indian classical as a profession: he was a vocalist. My mom and her elder brother did the same thing, following his steps. So, my exposure to Indian classical music was as natural as of light and air. I even cannot remember the time I began listening. Altogether, I grew up in a musical atmosphere which provided me a sense of thorough understanding of classical Indian music. But, as I was adding years to my age, the structure of Indian classical music gradually started to fail to satisfy me completely. No doubt, with a tradition of a few thousand years, its content was unquestionable, but somehow, I was unsatisfied with the vast ambiguity and abstractness it offered. I had some definite questions budding in my mind and I had to find out some more definite answers for them. And in a searching campaign like this, abstractness is the last thing you need. I was desperately looking for some means which could help me broach my questions, and I started to write. I started just to see whether it would help; and it did. It was the first time I could express myself correctly. I was not dependent on ambiguity any longer. I could have whatever I wanted. It was a thrill, it was fun, and it opened many possibilities. The words started to come out of me as a punch to the enemy’s face, as a kick on a football, as the sharp whistle of a pressure cooker and god knows what else. It was a time of outburst, like when it becomes quiet after a volcanic eruption, I was feeling much more relieved, like the touch of a feather, like the smell of a first kiss. I knew I had it. It is writing and nothing else that can save my soul.

As the days went by, heaps of diaries filled up my room. They were full of expressions of joy, anger, sadness, solitude, sexuality, even love, but expressions only, and nothing else. Expression is necessarily the primary element for any art form, but it is not the only one. If it were, painting would not have come to Paul Klee, flowing down the ages. It would have

satisfied itself after having the bison in the cave of Altamira. Thus I understood it is the time to make sense—make my “expressions” something more meaningful, of more worth. This understanding unlocks the second phase, and here the key word would be ‘communication’.

I gradually discovered a separate self which tries to write and to communicate with me, which reads my writing. So I, the reader-self, had to be more conscious, more attentive, and more eager to fulfill the two-way communication. It was a period of crisis indeed. On the one hand, I was writing as things were coming to me; and on the other hand I was trying to understand language and semiotics. It was like a split mirror image. It was like a game I was playing with myself. I was my only friend those days; the only enemy as well. So the reason I write became clear to me. It was, certainly, to communicate. As the game unfolded its endless tricks, I found my own writings more tangible for myself. I started to understand what I wanted to understand.

I deeply believe that every artist on this earth creates something primarily for herself or himself. There is no other reader, listener, or viewer that she or he thinks of while creating. I, as a poet, do support that. But, we are, after all, social animals. We like to interact, to share, to exchange. And here lies the last but not the least important of the reasons to write. After I have had myself as a reader of my work, in addition, I want someone else to be a reader. I want Miss J or Mr. V as a reader too. I want to share my thoughts, to exchange them with others. I want to see if what I think actually can make any difference to someone. So here is the final reason to write. No creator should be influenced by the popular sentiment while creating, but there is also no harm if people get to know your work.

Now is the time to face the second question of what I write: well, poetry.

The third part of the title of the panel refers to the very procedure of writing—that is, “how.” I used to read a comic book with a hero named Mandrake. He was a gem of a magician and he would always save good souls and punish the evil ones by using thousands of spectacular tricks. And at the end of every single comic strip, he was asked by somebody: “How on this earth did you do that?” and his humble answer with a mysterious smile would be: “Oh, you know, magicians never tell.” This could be the best answer for me too, but life is no comic strip, and neither are poets magicians.

To be very frank, the answer is I do not know *how* I write. Writing poetry always has something to do with different types of technicalities, but the basic structure is built up by thoughts, images, perception and experience. And no school can teach you these things. Unlike this part of the world, we do not have creative writing schools or courses in our land. It is the only art form that you have to learn by yourself. So, practically there is no one whom one can ask *how*. What my little experience as a poet says is that poetry comes to you—not always, but most of the time. It comes to you in various shapes, colors, smells, sounds and might be in terms of other dimensions as well. In my case, it never appears as a full, accomplished form. I only get a glimpse of it. When it comes to my mind I do not even know whether it is the initial part of a poem, the middle portion, or the conclusion. Some words strike my mind and suddenly I know therein lies a poem, as a little bone can lead you to the dinosaur. After that, I start to live with that fragment automatically. It is very awkward to have all sorts of permutations and combinations going on in your head while you are crossing the road, paying the bills or kissing your lover. It really is. But after some cultivation

and care, it starts to take shape and then I feel that I have the steering in my hands at last, and I can mold it how I want to. This is one side of the story. Sometimes poems do not come to you that easily and it's not worth trying. The only thing you can do is to wait. And this blank period is also a part of writing. How patiently you wait reflects your ability.

I think I have only tried to find out a glimpse of the answers which were asked for here. If it makes any sense to anybody, I will be happy enough to forget the pain from writing 1501 words in a single stretch.