

## ***THE HAIKU I WRITE*: Flashes**

Not all my compositions in this book fit easily into the pigeon holes of the haiku as conceived by its pundits in North America. Therefore, I call them Flashes.

Three main elements unite my compositions. One is that each contains three lines. Another element is that each Flash refers to either nature, time or a season. The third common element is the absence of punctuation, except for the period.

Traditionally, a collection of haiku is divided according to the seasons of the year, but I have sorted mine subject wise into four parts. The first part contains the Flashes that are connected with love; the second, with peace and war; and the third, with social concerns. The fourth part contains the remaining flashes which do not fall into the above groups.

My interest in Flashes was awakened towards the end of 1988, when I was intrigued by haiku, a word I had heard and read several times, but whose definition always perplexed me. When I began to

explore haiku seriously, a new vista of imagination was opened.

Haiku originated and matured in Japan and is popular there even today. Most of the early English writers of haiku, as well as those of today, do not know Japanese. Their knowledge of haiku, like mine, has been derived from translations. This ignorance of the original shape of haiku has helped to develop its variety.

In Japan, haiku has gone through many stages of development and modification. Masters do not agree on their approaches and philosophies and often criticize one another. This has happened also in the West. Prominent figures such as Ezra Pound found fault with other English haiku writers and vice versa, which continues even today.

One good that has come out of this literary bickering is the discovery of fresh pastures within the genre. Most creative artists are not satisfied adhering to established norms, because they want their work to be more unique and personal. This applies to haiku writers as well. I expect my haiku or Flashes to be read from this angle.

Yet, I am not against established norms as long as they serve some useful purpose. Otherwise, it would become boring

to follow the pointless practice of travelling again and again along the same beaten path. It is like trying to fly in a cage.

I suggest that the introduction of new trends into an old system should be welcomed with open arms. We know stagnant waters become breeding grounds for mosquitoes— anything that becomes stale will soon start to stink. It is in the interest of its health to let haiku breathe in fresh air. No one should be afraid of change or experimentation. If haiku is alive today, it is largely due to its flexibility to allow new trends to be incorporated into it.

One piece of advice that haiku pundits in the West give is to name or suggest the seasons faithfully in their compositions. This practice confines the pen. To repeat one element again and again without any purpose makes writing dull. Not many writers accept this practice, although I try it here.

Another piece of advice is to use telegraphic language. I admit, brevity is the soul of poetry, but to use telegraphic language without a reason does not make any sense.

In telegrams, extreme economy of words is acceptable, because it avoids

unnecessary costs. The message is important in this case, no matter how it is conveyed. Beauty is of no consideration. In poetry, and haiku is poetry, there is no need to revise and revise and revise again to get rid of articles and verbs without any purpose. This type of writing usually causes confusion and takes away from poetry the beauty or charm or grace or whatever one may call it. Therefore avoidance of articles and verbs is not my cup of tea, although I use them sparingly with my brand of haiku.

It is said that haiku is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. It is instantaneous- a flash--- a revelation. A haiku appears as a burst of lightning. A.F. Scott in his prominent book *Current Literary Terms* calls it "spiritual insight."

This angle was pioneered by Basho in the 16th century Japan. He emphasized poetry as an act of the subconscious mind. Something within compels a poet to write. Haiku is therefore a gem in rough shape. This thought gave rise to another school, which also accepted Basho as master, but urges editing to make the original language more comprehensible.

Many writers of haiku do not think in terms of these concepts because their

creative force will not always accept the rigid rules. In practice, however, both schools are right, because good haiku have been created spontaneously as well as non-spontaneously.

I believe that poets, like other human beings, are anxious to share their experiences in order to forge a line of communication that enhances their pleasure. That is why poets desire to be published and read. Bernard Shaw was right when he said, "If you do not write for publication there is little point in writing at all."

I believe that the joy of writing is in sharing and sharing is life.

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