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Haiku in India

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India has a rich variety of poetic forms. Some of these are as short as Japanese Haiku. Haiku has evoked deep interest in the Indian poetic world today. Not only have translations of Japanese Haiku been published in different Indian languages but many poets have written original Haiku-like poems. Any 17-syllable poem written in the 5-7-5 syllable pattern is called a Haiku. During the last decade, several collections of such Haiku poems have appeared in Hindi and in other Indian languages. In this article, I have tried to introduce the Haiku poetry being written in Indian languages.

Keywords: HAIKU, ZEN, POETIC FORM, SYLLABIC PATTERN, POETIC DICTION, BREVITY OF FORM, RHYME, POETIC SENSITIVITY, MA:TRA, DOHA, BOLI, MAHIYA.

The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate, wrote a travelogue entitled "Jāpān-Jātri" in the Bengali language after his first visit to Japan in 1916. In this travelogue, the poet talked about haiku and quoted some haiku poems in Bengali translations, including two famous pieces by Basho:

and Furu ike ya kawazu tobikomu mizu no oto
 Kare eda ni karasu no tomarikeri aki no kure

The Bengali translations are:

and Purono pukur Benger lāf Jaler shabdo
 Pochā dāl ektā kāk sharatkā

Introducing haiku to his readers, the poet writes: "We don't find three-line poem anywhere else in the world. These three lines are enough for their poet and the readers. The heart of the Japanese people does not sound like a waterfall; it is quiet like a lake." This was perhaps the first introduction of haiku in any Indian language.

India is a country of many languages, each with its own rich literary traditions.

Many of the old poetic forms in Indian languages are short and suggestive, like Dohā and barve in Hindi, Obi in Marathi, Boli and māhia in Panjabi and Tirukural in Tamil. Some of these succinct forms are very close to haiku. Buddhist thought and the Zen approach to life are also not alien to the common Indian mind. There is a long tradition of poetry in India where the real contents of the poem are not expressed in the literal meanings but are suggestive. I give here only one example. It is from Panjabi:

We koelāñ boldiañ Kade bol chandara kāwañ

The koels are singing
Why don't you also speak
O nasty crow!

The original poem contains only 18 syllables and is complete. The koel is an Indian bird which sings when the mango trees start blooming. It is a welcome bird with its sweet melodious voice and as a messenger of the spring season—but not the crow with its harsh voice. Both are black in appearance. Today, the koels are singing and the crow is silent but the singing voices of koels are painful to the young girl because of the absence of her lover who should have been with her in this season of love-making. According to the Indian belief, the crow brings the messages of dear ones; thus this entreaty to the crow to open his mouth.

Modern Indian literature is influenced by contemporary Western literature. Any literary movement in the West finds its echo on the Indian scene. Haiku also became known to the Indian literary world through English. Many of the early translators of haiku did not care for the brevity of the haiku form and freely translated the seventeen-syllable haiku with rhymes and explanations not existent in the original poems, to make their translations comprehensible to the Western reader. We may take an example of one such translation with the original haiku. The haiku is:

Hana no kumo kane wa Ueno ka . Asakusa ka

The English translation is:

A cloud of blossoms
Far and near
Then sweet and clear
What bell is that
That charms my ear
Is that Ueno or Asakusa

Let us take one more example. The haiku is from Basho:

Natsugusa ya tsuwamonodomo ga yume no ato

The English translation by C. H. Page is:

Old battlefield, fresh with spring flowers again—
 All that is left of the dreams
 Of twice ten thousand warriors slain

The original does not go that far. What is suggestive in the original has been explained in words in the translation for a reader who is not familiar with the haiku tradition.

With no knowledge of the Japanese language and no direct access to the original works, the first interest in haiku in India was developed through such translations. Some of the Indian poets started writing similar poetry in Indian languages. In the fifties, we find a new form of poetry developing which was short and expressive but free in style. We may take some examples from Hindi poetry:

The first shower of rain
 The sky has thrown
 Its roots on earth
 —Shrikant Varma

The butterflies
 Jumping from flower to flower
 Love letters of Spring god
 —Sarveshwardayal Saxena

The moon in the clouds
 Playing hide and seek
 A hare looking for its lair
 —Krishnakant Dube

Below is a poet's view of an aerodrome:

The lake of cement
 Spread far and wide
 Aluminium swans swim and fly away
 —Kailash Vajpeyi

With the changing political and social restlessness in the country, this form soon turned to satire and wit as its' main theme and became popular under various names.

With interest in haiku, many of the Indian poets translated haiku into their own languages and some of them even started writing original haiku poems, but most of these poems neither conformed to the discipline of the 5-7-5 syllable pattern nor had any concept of the season word. They were published as haiku because the poets

called them haiku. In the sixties, many of the Indian literary journals published introductory articles and translations of haiku poems. Let us consider some haiku in different Indian languages.

Assamese:

The Assamese poet Neelmani Fukan published his translations of Japanese poems into Assamese in 1971 under the title "Jāpani Kavitā." The book presents translations of 93 poems from 73 poets, which include haiku. The haiku poets are Moritake, Basho, Ransetsu, Raizan, Onitsura, Kikaku, Boncho, Buson, Ryota, Ranko, Issa, Shiki and Kubutsu. The forward of the book was written by Dr. Hiren Gosai, as a scholarly essay on the aesthetics of Japanese poetry and a brief introduction to haiku and tanka. Translations are faithful and retain the brevity of the original.

Bengali:

We have already talked about Rabindranath Tagore and his travelogue on Japan. Tagore himself wrote many short poems of two-three lines. These poems were published in a collection titled "Sphuling," meaning "Sparks." It is difficult to say how far Tagore was influenced by haiku in writing these poems but most of them were written extempore during 1924 on his second visit to Japan while travelling through the Orient. One of the poems in this collection reads:

Oh Japan! Thy oceans are restless
Thy land is calm
Mountains are dense and steep
Thy landscape is soft and green

The English translation of these poems was published under the title "Stray Birds" which the poet has dedicated to "Hara of Yokohama." Certainly, Japan was very much in the mind of the poet while writing these poems. We may take one piece from this collection:

Receiving kisses
From the sky, earth returns
In blossoms

Dr. Tara Prasad Dash, a scholar and professor of French literature, wrote poems in the 5-7-5 pattern in Bengali which were regularly published in the bi-monthly journal of the Indian Haiku Club. Many of his haiku were written during his visit to France. We may take two of his poems:

Winter night
Chilly winds blow
Melancholy

Night is silent
 Drunk with my ambitions
 I see no light

Gujrati:

The leading Gujrati poet Snehrashmi wrote many poems very close to the spirit and form of the original haiku. He strictly followed the seventeen-syllable pattern of 5-7-5 and set a pattern for other Gujrati poets. "Ruper Chandarnu" and "Dābā Hāth No Khel" are collections of Gujrati haiku poems by different poets. The title "Dābā Hāth No Khel" suggests that the poets of this collection have taken haiku as fun but there are many others like Niranjana Bhagat, Dr. Kamal Punjani and Ramesh Acharya who are writing haiku in Gujrati with all earnestness. The first collection of Snehrashmi was published in 1967 and is entitled "Soneri Chand Ruperi Suraj" (Golden Moon and Silvery Sun); it presents 359 haiku and 6 tanka poems. All the poems are printed with backgrounds of light coloured sketches and the work includes a 22-page essay on haiku written by the poet himself at the end. His second collection was published by the Gujrat Sahitya Academy (Gujrat Academy of Literature) in 1988. It is a tri-lingual collection presenting 304 haiku poems under the title "Sunrise On Snowpeaks." The original poems are in Gujrati with translation of each poem into English and Hindi. The Hindi translations are rendered by Dr. Bhagwat Sharan Aggrawal, himself a haiku poet in Hindi and professor of Hindi in Gujrat University. The English translations are by the poet himself. All the poems are of 17 syllables in the 5-7-5 pattern and this form has been kept in their Hindi translations as well. Let us take some of his poems:

Peak after peak
 I climb only to find
 A new peak

Reaching close
 Hillock becomes large
 Mountain small

In the mountain forest
 Sky is also hidden
 I am alone

Kannada:

V. Lalithamba, editor of the literary journal of the Kannada Academy of Literature, has translated many haiku poems into Kannada. Balurao, editor of the *Who's Who of Indian Writers*, writes original haiku poems in Kannada in his own free style, with no fixed pattern of syllables.

Marathi:

In 1978, the Marathi literary journal "Richā" brought out a special number on haiku with a long introductory article by Shirish Pai, a renowned Marathi poet, and haiku poems written by Sadanand Rege, Vasanthi Majumdar, Usha Mehta, Shirish Pai and many others. The weekly paper "Lok Sattā" also published a special number dated 5 July 1981 devoted to haiku and published translations of 17 Japanese haiku poets including Basho, Onitsura, Buson and Issa, and some Marathi haiku poems written by Richa Godbole, Anway Mulgaonkar, Maonohar Todkar and others. Shirish Pai popularized haiku by writing a number of articles and translations. A collection of haiku poems by Shirish Pai was published under the title "Shruwa." Most of the Marathi haiku are three-line short poems with no set pattern of length or number of syllables in each line. Naresh has written some parodies of haiku which can be called Marathi senryu. Suresh Mathur has successfully experimented with a pattern of 7-9-7 syllables in place of 5-7-5, pleading that this pattern is more suitable to the Marathi diction, and he has called it Marathi haiku. We may take one of his poems as an example:

Ādāt ek dwād
Bānasāyalelā pimpala
Vikat hanstoya

Breaking into syllables, it will be:

Ā dā t e k dwā d
Bā na sā ya le lā pim pa la
Vi ka ta han sa to ya

A naughty Pipal
Laughing mischievously
Inside the well

The pipal is an Indian tree which has grown inside the wall of a village well. The tree is considered sacred by the village folks and is not cut even if it grows in an inconvenient place, thus this mischievous laugh.

Richa Godbole received a prestigious literary award on her collection of short poems on nature at the age of 10. Paintings on these poems by a famous artist were exhibited in an art gallery in Bombay in 1981. Some of the paintings with her poems in translations were published by the popular Hindi weekly "Dharmyug" in its issue of 15 November 1981. Many literary critics have named her poems as haiku.

We may take some examples of Marathi haiku by Shirish Pai:

The rain stopped
From behind the Banana leaves
A butterfly flew away

The train moved so fast
 I could not even view the flowers
 Blooming on the way

A small bird
 Chirped in the garden
 My heart felt delighted

Panjabi:

Amrita Pritam, a renowned poetess and recipient of the prestigious Jnanpith award, has translated some haiku poems which were published in the literary journal "Nāgmani," which she edits. An article on the comparative study of haiku and Panjabi Māhia was written by the author of this paper and was published in the literary monthly journal "Paramparā" in its December 1979 issue.

Dr. Satyanand Java, ex-Director of the School of Foreign Languages, has brought the passion and liveliness of the folk culture of Panjab into haiku form. He writes haiku in the Panjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Sindhi languages. Mohan Katyal and Urmila Kaul have also written some haiku in Panjabi. We may take two pieces from Dr. Java:

New crop waves
 Walks like a peacock
 Village damsel

Jāts of Panjab
 Dance Bhangra
 Comes Vaisākhi

Vaisākhi is an Indian festival which falls in the middle of April when the crops are ripe in the fields. Bhangra is famous manly folk dance of Panjab and Jāt is a community mainly engaged in farming.

Sindhi:

Sindhi poets have given haiku another form, modifying a traditional Indian poetic form called Dohā. The metre of Dohā is 13-11-13-11 ma:trās, a ma:trā being the length of time taken to pronounce a single vowel sound. The Sindhi poets have taken the 11-13-11 ma:trā part of the Dohā and have called it Sindhi haiku. Narayan Shyam and Krishna Rahi and pioneers in promoting this form in Sindhi. Their haiku poems written in this form are collected in their poetry collections titled "Māk Bhina Rabel" and "Kulānch" respectively. Dr. Motilal Jotwani, a literary critic and poet himself, has translated many of their poems into Hindi in the same metre. In his words, Narayan Shyam and Krishna Rahi have given a new rhythm to haiku suitable to the Sindhi diction.

Hindi:

Agyeya, recipient of the Jnanpith Award and a leading Hindi poet, composed the following three lines in 1951:

Bird flew away
The leaf trembled
And then settled down

The poet writes, "The actual happening did not take as much time as I took in putting it in words. A bird touched a leaf, perhaps felt scared of something and flew away. I tried to catch the moment but it left a feeling in my mind as if something is still incomplete." In 1957, the poet visited Japan where he learnt about Zen and Koan. After his return, he translated many haiku poems into Hindi and one day suddenly realized that the lines which he had left as incomplete are, in fact, a complete poem. These lines were later collected in one of his collections as a poem. The poet writes, "Haiku is closest to our poetic sensitivity or perhaps it is closer to us than to the west." His collection of poems called "Ari O Karunā Prabhāmaya" published in 1959 contains a section of translations of his haiku poems and the above-quoted lines about haiku are a part of his introduction to this collection. In the words of Toshio Tanaka, professor of Hindi at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Agyeya is "the most successful translator of haiku in any foreign language." The poet does not know the Japanese language but he has tried to get into the depth of the poems with the help of his Japanese friends. Though taking poetic liberty in places, he has successfully rendered them into beautiful poems in translated versions. Where he has not succeeded in conveying the meaning of the original, or where he has strayed too far, he has called such poems influenced by or inspired by the Japanese haiku. In addition to translations, the poet has written many haiku-like poems of his own. Some of these are collected in the same collection along with his translations and others are included in his later collections. One of his poems on the torii gate of Japan is:

Temple is nowhere seen, image may not even be there
Touching the sky beyond the clouds is
A coloured gate of the temple

Another well-known name in the translation of haiku poems into Hindi is Dr. Prabhakar Machwe, ex-Secretary of the Bharatiya Sahitya Academy (Indian Academy of Letters) and a leading literary writer. He first introduced haiku with his translations in his book "Bhārat aur Asiā Kā Sāhitya (Literature of India and Asia)" published in 1960. Later, after his visit to Japan, he translated 250 haiku poems into Hindi, which are under publication.

Haiku was widely discussed and translated in Hindi during the sixties and seventies. Dr. Satyapal Chugh is another poet who wrote several haiku poems which are published in his different collections. His earlier style was influenced by Agyeya. Later, he developed his own style, following the 5-7-5 pattern. In one of his later

collection of poems called “Vāman Ke Charan,” a separate section is devoted to poems under the heading “Haiku.” In most of his poems a play on words becomes the dominant device.

My own translations of haiku were published in 1977 with a long introduction to haiku poetry. The left-hand pages of that book give original haiku in Japanese with furigana in Devanagari script. The top half of each right page carries a Devanagari transliteration of the poem and the lower half gives the Hindi translation. This was perhaps the first direct translation from Japanese into any Indian language with original poems printed in Japanese script. My second book on haiku came out in 1983. These publications evoked a fresh interest in haiku. A Haiku Club of India was formed in 1978 and a bi-monthly Hindi journal called “Haiku” was initiated as one of the activities of the club. The journal was in the format of an inland letter which covered haiku poems written in Hindi, poems written in other Indian languages in Devanagari script with Hindi translations, a reader’s forum, reviews of haiku collections published in India, and editorial notes. The membership of the club soon exceeded 400 nationwide. In 1989, a representative collection of Hindi haiku under the title “Haiku 1989” was brought out, introducing 30 poets with seven poems by each poet.

During the last decade, a number of collections of haiku have come out in Hindi. These include: “Shāshwat Khsitij” (Dr. Bhagwat Sharan Aggrawal), “Khushbu Kā Safar” (Dr. Sudha Gupta), “Haiku 575” (Dr. Laksman Prasad Naik), “Triveni” (Govinda Narayana Mishra), and “Mālavi Haiku” (Dr. Satish Dube). Dr. Sudha Gupta’s second collection, “Lakari Kā Sapanā,” and a haiku collection by Dr. Vidyabindu Singh are in press. Radheshyam has written haiku sequences on mythological themes numbering more than a thousand poems.

Indian haiku has accepted the brevity and form of haiku but is not related to any particular thought or ideology. Indian haiku is Indian in theme and experience and takes its subjects from Indian traditions and cultural concepts. The present political unrest and violence has also become the subject of Indian haiku. Whether all that is being written in India under the name of haiku can really be called haiku or not is also a subject of discussion, but anything written in the form of 5-7-5 syllables is designated as haiku.

There is a growing interest in haiku in India. The popularity of the term has been exploited by a commercial advertisement. A manufacturer of sarees has named his sarees Haiku Sarees. Beautiful these sarees may be, but they are not short in length.

インドに於ける俳句

ワルマ・サトヤブシャン

要旨：インドはそれぞれの言語はそれぞれの豊かな文学的伝統を持っている。多くの古い詩型は短くて俳句に近い。現代インドでは俳句についてますます関心が高まっている。俳句に興味を持った多くの詩人たちは俳句を自分の言語に翻訳して、自分の言葉で俳句のような短い詩を書き始めることさえした。五・七・五音数の形式で書かれたものはみんな俳句と名づけられている。本書の中で私はインドの言葉で書かれている俳句を紹介する。