



MY VISION ABOUT POETRY

Translation of
Edasseri's essay
Kavitha Ente
Sankalppathil

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Edasseri

A dainty girl forever - that is "Poetry". Compared to other branches of literature, she is of a different demeanor. She is not capricious like "Short Story" or eloquent like "Novel". She is not even the dignified lady with explicitly ardent expressions as "Drama". She is a darling who displays a little more of discipline and modesty and as such deserves special attention. But philosophers sharpen their ears for her babble. She is hymn of bravery for the valiant entering life's battle and divine nectar for those who retreat wounded.

Because of these special attributes, this little cute girl in the noble family of literature is under close observation by all. All things related to her are keenly scrutinized - her poise, gait, gesture, language, playfulness, laughter, garments and ornaments. Centred around her are constant apprehensions, never-ending sermons alongwith loving care and also warnings.

'What does she contain'? - Anxiety: 'Too much of playfulness' - Exhortations on duty: 'Is it good to move around without ornaments in the neck and ears' - Grandmother's affection: 'You're crossing the limits' - Anger of uncle. In spite of all these, there still remain some misunderstandings. And it seems that some of these apprehensions are not out of place.

There are scholars who said "poetry is dying" and some who even commented "poetry is dead". Even these people said that with a sigh. Surely, such comments do not arise from their antipathy towards poetry for they had reached the lofty positions they occupy in the literary shpere through critical study of poetry. What the advocates of poetry should do is not to gag them by retorting, but take precautions to see that such a situation, where poetry ceases to exist does not arise - an eventuality which lovers of literature dare not conceive.

Poetry is slimming. Is it due to lack of nutrition? Of late, she is fed with scientifically prepared 'tin food'. It has been quite some time now that high-pich exhortations are made to poets, like 'eliminate superstitions' and 'think scientifically'. I have a strong feeling that it is this scientific diet that is giving a disagreeable taste to poetry.

Is it dissemination of knowledge the principal function of poetry? It is true that there is an idea provoked by thought in poetry; and that very characteristic, positions poetry differently from basic arts. But it has to be conceded that emotion should be important in poetry. When the intellectual element increases, poetry moves to the realm of either science or philosophy as the case may be.



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The power of imagination of the poet as also his ability to lose himself in reveries are fundamental to the emotional content in poetry. The logical basis which is essential for scientific outlook is not required for reverie. Many a time, great dreams occur transcending what we usually refer to as "scientific truths". Not only in the dream-world but in real life also this "scientific truth" is best kept outside the fence. There cannot be any existence for this scientific truth in our entangled family relations and social life. Many a time, the scientific outlook helps only to put the sweetness out of the poet's imagery.

Each human race has its own veritable treasures of myths. For India, her own epics are invaluable treasures. There is no community in the whole world which does not have such a wealth. Most among these myths do not have existence even for a moment in the light of scientific knowledge. Hence, they surely belong to the category of superstitions. Yet, the world famous works, as you can see, are created by great authors - both ancient and modern - on the foundations of these so called fallacies.

Certain questions may arise now. Is it necessary to revive superstitions? Are we to believe that the 'snake' will swallow the moon? To eliminate small pox, are we to worship the deity who killed the ogres 'Sumba' and 'Nisumba'? Are we to pass on to the next generation the belief that in each family-compound there is the presence of blood thirsty deities and in each prayer room there is the presence of the mighty 'Devi'? Are we to keep aside one cent in every acre of land in this small state of ours reserved for serpent groves on the assumption that they bring prosperity? A thousand such questions may crop up. All these are necessary in the poet's consciousness and in his creative process, I believe. Let me explain:

Human mind while absorbing absolute truth - or the very science - is also capable of being emotionally charged with starkly unreal images. Those emotions are neither artificial nor shallow. It is based on this unique ability of the mind that the art of drama exists. Examples for this are aplenty. While knowing well that 'Nalini' and 'Leela' are imaginary characters of the great poet 'Kumaran Asan', readers who read those verses are overwhelmed by emotional turmoil and they burst into tears.

Pardon me for a couple of words about myself. I wrote a poem titled "Abhayam Thedi" (Seeking Refuge). After reading that poem, an acquaintance asked me in surprise, "Edasseri! you too have gone for Sabarimala pilgrimage, haven't you?" I don't know what will happen if I go. But it seemed the last thing he expected from me. I did not deny it too vehemently. Think of it, on a person like me who has not witnessed even an "Ayyappan Vilakku", the mantle of 'Guruswamy' status, which one can hope to get only through hard penance, is being bestowed upon absolutely free! But it is not a real pilgrimage on my part which triggered that



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poem. It is a seasonal sight. The sight of thousands of devotees clad in dark attire moving along, unfazed by the severe chill and carrying the twin black bundles on their head. This was like the rain clouds carrying pitcher-full of water and climbing up to the peak of a distant eastern mountain at the onset of the monsoon. With the same fervor, I move along the path of my hard life, carrying the heavy bundle of burden of my life and trying to keep my legs, which shake due to old age, steady on the ground. Keeping their magnificent vision in my workshop I molded a precious metaphor for my life. If there is anything unscientific in it, I would say, "let it be!". But, if four more 'Ayyappas' climb up the mountain after reading the poem 'Seeking Refuge', I am neither responsible for the salvation they attain nor for the suffering they might endure.

What comes out clear is that; be it on whatever grounds, a poet should never denounce the age old literary works he has been handed down through generations alongwith the multitudes of Gods and Deities and the myths depicting numerous good and evil spirits.

Yet another criticism is that there is too much of babble. This accusation arises from those who argue that all branches of knowledge should be wheels of the chariot moving towards the goal of socialism. I don't hold the view that it is a sin to make poetry purpose oriented. But don't forget that poetry has its own limitations. Critics propounding this adventurous tendency have to be cautioned thus:

'Tender petals my child,
may support legs of a beetle
but ne'er the feet of a bird'

It is with pollination that the vegetation flourishes. And this great task of pollination is carried out unintentionally and unselfishly by the butterflies with their tenderwings and legs. It is the same way that the poet with his beautiful and tender art fulfills his service to society. I feel that both the interjection at the poet, "You have no social sense" and the poet's retort, "I have absolutely no social obligation" are extreme views. Moreover, for the advancement of socialism those outside the party can fruitfully do many things than those inside. What an absurd argument will it be if one goes on insisting that since butterflies fly they should perform as bomber crafts'!

The criticism that poem does not adorn herself with sufficient ornament, deserves attention. The girl who does not adorn herself well, defeats the very purpose of creation. But there is a doubt whether a lot of misconception has crept into this also. Reacting to the outdated taste of the lady from the bygone generation who adorns her grand daughter with vintage ornaments, her boyfriend whispers "Let us crash into the Pyra-



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mids of Egypt and enjoy the beauties resting there!"

Those who used to be delighted with the glittering metaphors and similes dangling on the body of poetry cannot comprehend the discretion that the modern girls show on the use of colors and their apt matching. They refuse to understand when they are told about tender metaphors that perform the right function of illuminating those parts that needs to be highlighted rather than ending up in self exhibition. On the contrary they keep on chanting 'incomprehensible'.

There is incomprehension. It has turned out to be a rather comic misfortune. I suspect whether this "incomprehension" is not a hymn mutually chanted by those who write modern poetry or those who either stand in that group or are identified with that group.

When I say that incomprehension is not due to the fault of either the writer or the reader, don't think that I am off my head. I shall explain:

Figures of speech in poetry is supposed to help in the appreciation of poetry. It is a sign board to help the reader to get close to the heart of the poet. Prior to the invention of figures of speech and their hand-holding, readers must have been confounded before the poet's transcendental evolution from 'direct metaphor' (Roopakam) to 'implicit metaphor' (Roopakathisayokthi). (See notes*)

A thory of poetry analysis (Alankara Sasthram) in Malayalam language did not take shape or develop except for certain precepts based on the rules which were suitable for evaluation and appreciation of Sanskrit poetry. Since the year 1930, new movements had made their appearances in Malayalam literature. Indeed, tides of various 'isms' emerged in the field of literature. Alas, attempts were made to evaluate Malayalam poetry which flourished during these movements adopting the old and inappropriate aesthetic tools or by using borrowed tools from foreign countries, which were intended for poems from a different cultural milieu. The harsh reality is that If a theory of poetry analysis (Soundarya Sasthra) which can comprehend and interpret the new trends in Malayalam poetry does not develop, poetry can be deemed as well dead for those who appreciate Malayalam poetry.

The next point is the allegation that lady poetry lacks discipline. It is noteworthy that this complaint came up after the year 1947, which was a great turning point in the life of Indians. However, this allegation is more severe towards drama and novel than towards poetry. Therefore, there need be only one advocate for all the branches of literature, to give reply to the argument.

It is in the economic relations and family relations that the absence of discipline is more manifest.

Generosity and compassion were highly cherished ethical values both in literature and human life. But, at least after year 1947 the year of inde-



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pendence, compassion has come to be viewed as counterfeit and generosity as sheer hypocrisy. Their position in the value system has been substituted by sense of justice.

"One paisa, one paisa, Echoed
The 'Villua' mountain valley"

When these lines were written, an individual's generosity could cool the poet's heart which burned at the sight of a beggar child.

"Hasten, be pale and tremble, Look there
Before you is tomorrow, the world conqueror"

When these were written, nothing but a setup that envisages a fair economic equality could put out the fire in the poet's heart.

It is impossible to evaluate poems which plead for mercy and roar for justice with the norms of discipline alone.

The lack of discipline that has occurred in family relations has reached an alarming level. There too, the issue is the equality based relationship between man and woman. There is no state like Kerala which has adorned slavery with such a beautiful veil. The landlord-tenant system which we have thrown out is a good example. It is only when we killed the beast, that we understood its fierceness. Like the tenants of that time, the wives of today also live with the impression that they are independent and loved. Slavery deserves to be pitied under conditions when one is not even aware of its existence.

In a free society it is not possible to tolerate slavery (even if it is covered in gold) within the family, which is its primary unit. Therefore, today's 'Sita', if portrayed by a writer in the present day reality of a family, will tell 'Rama' who is asking her to prove her chastity by jumping into the fire, "Milord, you were also in 'Kishkinda' along with beautiful monkey girls. Lakshmana, prepare a pyre for your brother also. Chastity should be maintained meticulously".

No writer with social consciousness will be ready to praise a pathetic woman, who is raped lifelong by a man whom she despises, only because he happens to be her husband. Family, the basic unit of society which is anchored on wrong foundations, is shattering in the light of truth. The foundation must be changed!

In this context I have a request to the poets. More than reflecting the present day life, a vision on Life as to what it should ideally bloom into, is also expected from good poetry.

It is my belief that the poets in Kerala have the power to move with



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time and transform society with their pen. I, therefore, have no anxiety about the future of poetry.

**Translator's note:*

Edasseri has referred to the incomprehension of the fascinating development or shift from "Roopakam" to "Roopakathisiyokthi", when an appropriate Alankara Sastra was not evolved. These two figures of speech can be explained thus: "Time is a thief" is Roopakam as time is explicitly matched to a thief. "Love sometimes has dangerous thorns" is an 'implied metaphor', a Roopakathisiyokthi. Here love is compared to a rose, without naming it.

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