

# A HISTORY OF INDIAN HAIKU<sup>1</sup>

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## HAIKU AND CLASSICAL INDIAN AESTHETICS

Haiku seems to have become a new mantra in India. If you tell people you're into haiku, you'll see stars in their eyes!

Indians are slowly, but surely waking up to its beauty and the reasons are not far to seek. Haiku is about nature's creative force and if we read the *Rig Veda*, all we see are verses in praise of nature. Imagine one of the oldest civilisations known to man, before there was language as we know it now—when the sun was not called the sun neither the moon nor the earth were known by their names. Probably, all that men and women did was to marvel at the colours and the wonders around them. It's not surprising that nature was worshipped and adored in the Vedic period.

Hindus and Buddhists believe that all Creation is composed of five essential elements, The *Panchabhootam*. With death, everything is transposed into these elements of nature, balancing the cycle of evolution.

The five elements are:

Ether—*Akasha* in Sanskrit—is associated with sound

Air—*Vayu*—is associated with sound and touch

Fire—*Agni*—with sound, touch and form

Water—*Jalam*—with sound, touch, form and flavour

Earth—*Prithvi*—is associated with sound, touch, form, flavour and smell

This classification and this thinking are woven into the fabric of our daily activities. It's widely used in all art, including poetry, literature, dance, music, painting and even *Ayurveda*—a system of traditional medicine native to India.

To this, add that core ingredient of haiku—the art of suggestion. The famous Bharatanatyam dancer Rukmini Devi Arundale said that *Abhinaya* in dance—the rendering of the various emotions through body and facial expression—needs to be mere suggestion, anything more becomes drama.

1. The first part of this report was published in *A Hundred Gourds* 2.3, June 2013.

It would not be a far stretch to say with haiku we're touching base with our roots. Haiku poetry fascinated both Rabindranath Tagore and Subramanya Bharathi—revered poets from Bengal and Tamil Nadu—at the beginning of the last century. A recent phenomenon in our haiku landscape has been Prof. Satya Bhushan Verma, a professor emeritus of Jawaharlal Nehru University. He was chosen for the Masaoka Shiki International Haiku Prize in 2002, and he shared the prize money of one million yen with the American poet, Cor van den Heuvel.

#### UNITY IN DIVERSITY

India, known for its unity in diversity, has no national language. The official languages of The Republic of India are Hindi [only 41% of the country speaks in this language] with each state having its own official language, for example—Maharashtra State has Marathi as its official language and Tamil Nadu has Tamil and so on. It gets extremely difficult to codify them into one whole. English in many instances becomes the link language. And with globalization, English becomes indispensable.

A land of multi-cultural history and growth, poetry in India has flourished from ancient times. Probably the oldest form of poetry in India was the *Sangam* poetic traditions,<sup>2</sup> which flourished nearly two thousand years ago. There are many proofs that the bulk of the literature was written from 150 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. It's interesting to note [from a *hokku*/haiku perspective] that in these poems one finds close links with nature and almost every line has some element of nature—mammals, birds, insects, trees, flowers, plants, stars, constellations, planets, ocean, mountains, forests and so on. The predominantly secular *Sangam* poems influenced the later religious works of Jain, Buddhist, Saivite and Vaishnavite poets.

In Sanskrit, the mandalas in the *Vedas* consists of *suktas* or hymns of two lines, so also the epic *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were in verse. The famous *Bhagavad Gita* [*Song of the Bhagavan*] is a 700-verse scripture, which is a part of the *Mahabharata*.

Many of the old poetic forms have been practiced like the *Dohā* and *Barve* in Hindi, *Obi* in Marathi, *Boli* and *Mābia* in Punjabi and *Tirukural* in Tamil. Satya Bhushan Verma says in his book *Haiku in India* that some of these succinct forms were very close to haiku. He continues to say that with no knowledge of the Japanese language and no direct access to the original works, the first interest in haiku in India developed through translations that were made available then. And, some of the Indian poets began to experiment with short poetry.

Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate, wrote a travelogue titled *Jāpān Jātri* after his visit to Japan in 1916.<sup>3</sup> In this the poet has spoken about haiku and quoted a few haiku, which had two famous poems of Bashō.

*Furu ike ya kawasu tobikomū mizu no oto*

and

*Kare ida ni karasu no tomarikeri aki no kure*

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2. Details of the Sangam poetic traditions were taken from Vaidehi Herbert's *Sangam Tamil Poetry Translations*.

3. References and details taken from Satya Bhushan Verma's book *Haiku in India* for the information given here on Rabindranath Tagore.

The Bengali translations are:

*Purono pukur Bengar lāf Jaler Shabdo*

and

*Pochā dāl ektā kāk sharatkāl*

Talking about haiku to his readers, the poet writes: “We don’t find three line poems anywhere else in the world. These three lines are enough for the poet and the readers. The heart of the Japanese does not sound like a waterfall; it is quite like a lake.”

Tagore later went on to write haiku-like poems, which he published in a book titled *Sphuling* (*Sparks*). Later it was translated into English as *Stray Birds* which the poet had dedicated to ‘Hara of Yokohama.’

As mentioned earlier, Subramanya Bharathi from South India, a contemporary of Tagore, took the initiative of introducing haiku to the Tamil people.

Tamil is one of the oldest languages in India, known for poems like one line *Aathizbudi*, two-line *Thirukkural* and three-line *Sindhar* but these are not called haiku.

In 1916, Bharathi wrote an article titled “*Japanea Kavidhai*” in the magazine *Sudesamithran*, based on a haiku article written by Yonae Noeguchi in *Modern Review*, Calcutta. Bharathi had translated two Japanese haiku in that article. These two haiku were the first introduction of this art form to the people of Tamil Nadu.

The Tamil translations by Bharathi were:

பரூவ மழயைின்  
புழை யொலி கடேப்ரீர்  
இங்கென் கிழ்ச் சுவைகளே  
—புசனோன் யோ சாஹோ

*Paruva mazaiyin  
puzaiyoli kEtpeer  
ingen kizach chevigalE*

தீப்பட்டரெரிந்தது  
வீழ் மலரின்  
அமதை யென்னே  
—ஹோ கஷி

*Theppatterindbatu  
veezhu malarin  
amaidhi yennE*

In this article, Bharathi says, “the one who understands loneliness and silence and the language of the flowers and lives in oneness with nature is a poet.” This only restates Yonae Noeguchi’s observation that, “the specialty of Japan’s poetry is telling something well even when written in a concise manner.”

Paavendhar Bharathidasan, who had affirmed Bharathi as his guru, had also published several translated haiku in *Kuyil Magazine*. It should be mentioned that these two have published only translations of Japanese haiku in the magazine.

Haiku introduced by Mahakavi Bharathi on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1916 is reaching its centenary year in two years’ time.<sup>4</sup> In anticipation, a newspaper especially for haiku was instituted on Basho’s birthday, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2013, in his memory as the father of haiku. To celebrate the

4. Excerpts from the essay ‘The Birth of Haiku and its Growth in Tamil,’ written by Kannikkovil Raja and translated into English by Ramesh Anand for the information given here on Subramanya Bharathi.

hundred years of haiku in Tamil, the Tamil haiku poets have given a proposal to the state government to bring out a haiku stamp and envelope and to name a street in Chennai as Haiku. The Tamil haiku poets have already celebrated the silver jubilee (1984–2009) to mark the completion of 25 years since the publication of the first haiku book in Tamil.

#### LOOK EAST: A NEW SON RISES

After receiving the prestigious Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Ray with Rosette from the Japanese Emperor for promoting better understanding between India and Japan, Professor emeritus of Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University Dr. Satya Bhushan Varma is to receive yet another honour, the Masaoka Shiki International Haiku award in Japan this year. Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty writes, in *The Hindu*, September 2002:

He has many firsts to his credit—first professor of Japanese language and literature in India; author of the first Japanese-Hindi dictionary; first Indian to receive “the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Ray with Rosette” and now the first Indian selected for the prestigious Masaoka Shiki International Haiku Award.

Basking in the glory of this latest laurel, which he would formally receive in December this year in Japan, Japanese language expert and professor emeritus of Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr. Satya Bhushan Varma says, “I can also be called the first to promote Haiku poetry in India.” While the Indian academia looked towards West for knowledge, Varma jumped into the look-East policy. Fully involved in the development of the JNU's Japanese department, the only degree-awarding centre in the language in India, the professor not only translated many Japanese manuscripts into Hindi, but also brought out a bi-monthly in the Indian national language on Haiku poetry.

“Many Haiku written in other Indian regional languages were also published in the magazine in Devnagiri script which introduced haiku to Indian readers in the real sense,” he adds. One of his books in Hindi, *Japani Kabitaye*, published haiku in Japanese script alongside their Hindi translations.

“This book created interest in many Indian readers to enjoy haiku,” he says, mentioning that he is in touch with the publishers for a reprint.

Recognising his years-long effort towards promotion of Indo-Japanese collaboration in literature, the Ehime Cultural Foundation of Japan has selected Varma for the bi-yearly award given in the name of one of the four great pillars of haiku, Masaoka Shiki. The year 2002 being the 100<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Shiki, Varma attaches it great prestige.

“Bashō, Boson, Issa and Shiki are considered the four greatest poets of haiku in Japan. I am really happy that the award named after Shiki will be conferred on me,” adds this Sahityakaar Sammaan awardee. Involved in many Indo-Japanese friendship organisations, Varma is also pleased that he would visit the birthplace of Shiki—Matsuyama—to receive the award.

“I visited Matsuyama in 1971 and am really looking forward to see the city again during the International Haiku Festival. The additional shine will be the award-receiving occasion,” he conveys with a smile.

A many-timer to Japan, this former visiting professor of Kyoto-based International Research Centre for Japanese Studies and Academic Advisor in Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University authored his Hindi-Japanese dictionary there. “It took me one year to compile more than 10,000 words,” he says. Satisfied at the growing interest among youngsters in learning the language, the veteran, however, rues that the JNU's Japanese department is the only academic institution in the entire country to confer degree on Japanese. “The situation should improve,” he says.

When Surya Rao wrote to me asking if we could attempt a small feature on “Haiku in Indian languages” in the November/December issue 2013 of *Muse India*, I accepted wholeheartedly. We both agreed that doing such a feature will be of interest to many, now that the popularity of haiku is catching on rapidly.

I contacted several English-language haiku [ELH] poets, as we’re called, to scout around for haiku in their mother tongue. This challenge was graciously accepted by Angelee Deodhar for Hindi, A. Thiagarajan for Tamil, Arvinder Kaur for Punjabi, Geethanjali Rajan for Malayalam, Sanjukta Asopa for Bangla, Rama Krishna Perugu for Telugu and Puja Malushte for Marathi. Of course I would have loved to showcase many more languages, but decided not to be too ambitious.

A lot of spade work was done by each editor. Many of them said they loved the exercise and this experience has enriched them beyond words. But the most difficult, I think, is translation. Geeta Dharmarajan of Katha once said that we should aim at transcreation and not at translation. To keep the spirit of the original language and still retain the flow and beauty of the language into which it is given birth, is tricky—it’s a walk on a razor’s edge.

Indian languages don’t readily lend themselves to translation into English. We could probably say the same for the translations of the Japanese masters too, for they fall short most often, except for a few remarkably outstanding translations. Bashō’s famous haiku “an old pond / a frog jumps in / the sound of water” is said to have been translated more than a several hundred times!

In India we can consider Rabindranath Tagore and Subramaniya Bharati as pioneers of haiku. And in most states haiku has been gathering momentum over the years, but existing mostly in nuclei unknown to the world at large.

We now come to the important question—is haiku as practiced in our regional language any different from the English-language haiku that’s written in India and the rest of the world? It’s a very big yes and a no!

**Sound structure/syllables:** Haiku is about sounds, which until recently was wrongly considered as syllables outside Japan. Haiku can be written in 1, 2, 3 or 4 lines and has no title. To make things easier, I’ll be dealing only with 3 line haiku, here.

Line 1 – 5 sounds / counts

Line 2 - 7 sounds

Line 3 – 5 sounds

The traditional 17 sound structure in Japanese haiku doesn’t translate into 17 syllables in English. The world knows traditional haiku in Japanese language as 5/7/5. But no longer does English-language haiku follow this strict syllable count. ELH is best from 10 to 14 syllables.

When it comes to our regional languages, each language needs to dictate the number of sounds and one cannot have it as a general ‘rule’.

For example:

What are sounds? Let's take a look:

*Akai* – in Japanese means red

But how is it pronounced in Japan?

a/ ka/ ee – 3 sounds

As against English – red – which is just 1 sound

Now let's take Tamil

Red – *akai* in Tamil is *shivapu* – shi/va/pu – 3 sounds

In Hindi – it is *lal* – 1 sound.

**Kigo:** the seasonal reference. In ELH we place a lot of importance to seasonal reference, which is widely known as *kigo* in Japanese parlance. The flow, 'a sketch from nature' and simple language are given great importance in ELH. But a new development in the haiku scene is emerging—which is, going back to *hokku* and thus to Bashō, who gave more importance to the creative force of nature, the ever-moving and the ever-transient. If you take this angle into consideration, then our regional language haiku is just *there*, closer to the spirit of Japanese haiku than English-language haiku!

**Kire:** the cut. The most crucial limb in a haiku is the 'cut,' what is known as *kire* in Japanese terminology. In almost all our regional languages, I see this 'cut' being employed most effectively. The *kire* aids the juxtaposition of two images and creates an in-built tension, which is what gives a haiku that high!

**Kireji:** the cut marker and punctuation. Another very distinctive difference I saw was that most haiku poets kept away from punctuation—what we call *kireji*—the cut marker in English-language haiku.

The Punjabi haiku that Arvinder Kaur sent me were strangely very much like the English-language haiku we read in international journals. When I enquired, Arvinder said there are no Punjabi haiku journals and some of the writers write both in Punjabi and in English. Maybe that is the reason that we see punctuation like ellipsis and em-dash to show the fragment-and-phrase structure clearly in the Punjabi examples shown here.

**Rhyme:** I do not know where the convention of rhyming has been picked up by our regional language haiku. As far as I know Japanese haiku don't rhyme nor does ELH. Marathi takes the cake when it comes to rhyming!

**The use of English words!** A very interesting phenomenon was the use of English words in haiku—just as ELH poets in India use Indian words in English haiku!

Haiku is an ocean. One can keep talking, discussing, and arguing endlessly about these subtle differences and similarities. All these so-called conventions and “rules” are one end of the spectrum, the other end is balanced beautifully with haiku—for a good haiku is a good haiku.

I would like here to showcase five haiku from each language. The ones chosen were those that lent themselves well to English translation, thus enabling haiku lovers from outside India to get a taste of what Indian haiku is all about. So here are haiku in Bangla, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamizh and Telugu, steeped in their *rāsas* and fragrances. In a short write-up prefacing the haiku, the editors have given a concise and neat summary of haiku as practiced in the regional languages today.

**i. Bangla.** (Sanjuktaa Asopa and Kashinath Karmakar, editors)

Almost a century ago, Rabindranath Tagore became acquainted and enchanted with haiku during his stay in Japan. He understood the essence of haiku perfectly, translated some haiku classics in Bangla and even wrote some short haiku-like poems himself. Yet, in the ensuing years, haiku never quite succeeded in carving out a niche for itself in the Bengali literary scene. Although Kalyan Dasgupta compiled and published *Jaapani Haiku—A Bengali Anthology of Japanese Haiku* in the year 2000 in Calcutta, the reading public remains largely unresponsive to this brief form of poetry and not many Bengali journals and magazines are interested in their publication.

Though haiku is generally perceived as a tercet written in seventeen syllables, the handful of poets who write haiku in Bangla approach it in different ways and vary in their choice of subjects, refusing to be limited only to nature-centric haiku. Aju Mukhopadhyay is mainly spiritual and introspective in his approach, while Quamrul Hassan's deft pen-strokes capture the small vignettes of everyday life. Kashinath Karmakar (who also is an English-language haiku poet) flits between nature and romance and tries to adhere to the 5-7-5 rule—not in syllables, but in Bangla letters and also to *matrabritto*,<sup>5</sup> wherever possible.

Across the border in Bangladesh, haiku cannot be said to be flourishing exactly, but there are definitely more haiku enthusiasts there. For Muzib Mehdy, a noted exponent of this form, haiku is not only born of, but is also inductive to meditation. In his own words: “I abide by the restrictions imposed by *kigo* and *kireji*, recognize the distinction between haiku and *senryū* and prefer to be bound by 5-7-5 and *matrabritto*. At the same time, I do not consider these restrictions insurmountable, if it could lead me to a new joy, an exploration of greater beauty. Interested as I am in Zen, my primary aim is to test out how far words can take me along this meditative journey.”

|   |   |
|---|---|
| poila baisakh—<br>tomar pat bhanga saarir gondhey<br>swapnera ghorey pherey | first of baisakh—<br>the scent of your crisp sari<br>stirring my dreams |
|---|---|

—Kashinath Karmakar (Translation by Sanjuktaa Asopa)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Amar din jai rat-o jai<br>nijer prakosthe nijer<br>samay bede jai | my days and nights pass<br>within my own shell<br>time expands |
|---|--|

—Aju Mukhopadhyay (Translation by the author)

*Jagari*-1415 issue, summer 2008

|  |  |
|--|--|
| aanginar gandharaaj jhop<br>barir malik o bhrityer nake<br>samabhabe gandho pouchhe dichhe | yard gardenia<br>for the master and servant<br>equally its scent |
|--|--|

—Muzib Mehdy (Translation by Sanjuktaa Asopa)

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5. In *matrabritto*, *muktakkhar*—that is, words ending with vowel sounds—are always one syllable and *boddhakkhar*—that is, words ending with consonant sounds—are always two syllables.

chhutir shakal  
janlar baire  
murgiwallar haank

—*Quamrul Hassan (Translation by Sanjuktaa Asopa)*

holiday morning  
outside the window  
the chicken-seller's call

brishtibari  
megher anubaad  
jalbhashai

—*Muzib Mehdy (Translation by Sanjuktaa Asopa)*

rainfall  
the clouds translated  
in water's tongue

## 2. Hindi. (Angelee Deodhar, editor and translator)

The initiation of haiku poetry in Hindi literature may be credited to the poet Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsyayan “Agyeya.” In his book *Ari o karuna prabbamaya* (1959), Agyeya translated some Japanese haiku in Hindi and also published some of his own haiku-like Hindi verse.

However, it was the efforts of Prof. Satyabhushan Verma which resulted in the introduction of direct translations of Japanese haiku and the subsequent widespread acceptance of haiku in Hindi literature. *Haiku—1989*, edited by Kamlesh Bhatt Kamal and Ramniwas Panthi then provided permanence to haiku in Hindi. Thereafter *Haiku Patra*, edited by Prof. Satyabhushan Verma, *Haiku Bharti*, edited by Bhagvatsharan Agrawal and *Haiku Darpan*, edited by Dr. Jagdish Vyom may be credited for providing a platform for Hindi haikuists and also for spreading the joys of haiku for one and all. The publishing of *Haiku Darpan* continues to date. Dr. Angelee Deodhar has worked relentlessly to translate, edit and publish many haiku books of merit from English to Hindi, thereby helping Hindi haikuists to understand and connect with their counterparts writing in various languages on an international level. At present Dr. Jagdish Vyom is working towards the historic task of collating and editing the best, published Hindi haiku in the form of a *Haiku Kosb*.

The state of haiku in Hindi Literature is satisfactory. However, this haiku movement can only attain its full potential and satisfy our literary purpose only if all haikuists work together to create a two way dialogue between the Hindi and English-language haiku being written in India.

Written in Hindi by Dr. Jagdish Vyom, translated into English by Angelee Deodhar and Paresh Tiwari.

sookhe thoonth mein  
varsha ne uгаа di hai  
hari konpal

—*Ram Krishan ‘Viklesh’*

on a dried log  
the rain has grown  
green moss

saagar ke paas  
rahi phir bhi pyaasi  
tat ki rait

—*Satyanand Java*

near the ocean  
the beach sand remains  
still thirsty

bheeshan sheet  
kaath ke dev jaley  
jeevan hetu

—*Prof. Aditya Pratap Singh*

bitter cold  
wooden deities burn  
for the sake of life

sab ekatrit  
baba ki kahaniyan  
smriti mein kaid!

—*Jainan Prasad (Fiji)*

gathered together  
grandfather’s stories  
captured in memories!

patange jale  
deepak ki baahon mein  
thodi-si raakh

—*Ram Nirwas 'Panthi'*

moths burn  
in the arms of the lamp  
just a little ash

### 3. Malayalam. (Geethanjali Rajan, editor)

ariyaatha bhaashayil  
kelkaatha shabdathil  
ethra madhuramayi  
nee paadunnu

How sweetly you sing  
In a language I don't understand  
And a voice I can't hear.

—*Thachom Poyil Rajeevan (Pranayasatakam, bilingual edition, 2010)*

Malayalam literature has always been vibrant and thought provoking. This holds good for Malayalam haiku, as well. There are many poets who write haiku in Malayalam. The topics range from nature to reminiscence and love, from society to political commentary.

Malayalam haiku seems to follow the Japanese haiku in ethos, more than English language haiku. For instance, some of the haiku are poignant and meditative without restricting itself to the phrase and fragment format. Here, personification, metaphor and simile are not taboo. Malayalam haiku draws inspiration from a wealth of ethnic factors indigent to Kerala—flora, fauna, culture and customs. However, this does not restrict the readability in any way. In fact, it offers a great insight into the life in Kerala. Many of the practitioners live overseas and this too, is seen to influence their haiku (usage of desert *kigo*, for instance).

In 2012, many haiku poets who write in Malayalam organised themselves into a forum called Haiku Association of India (HAI) and published a collection of Malayalam (and English) haiku, *Kaikkudannayile Kadal (sea in the cupped palm)*. The haiku that appear here have been selected from this book. The translations are mine. By translating these poems, I hope a larger readership will have access to the wealth of haiku in Kerala. This does not mean that the tradition of writing haiku is well-established in Malayalam. On the contrary, it is in a nascent state, much like a chrysalis—on the threshold of becoming a captivating, enchanting butterfly. Each poet has to nudge it on, like tightening the wires on a bonsai—slowly, but surely.

I quote another gem from Thachom Poyil Rajeevan (*Pranayasatakam, bilingual edition, 2010*) to sum up my hopes for the future of haiku in Malayalam:

ninnilekkullathaayirunnu  
innollam enikku thettiya  
vazhikallemlaam . . .

All the ways  
I lost so far  
Have been to you.

choru pothinja  
ila thorannappol  
ammayude mannam  
—*Abhay Jayapalan*

I open the leaf  
that holds my meal  
mother's fragrance

mannal kaatu  
aakashachumbikalkkidayil  
melvilaasam thirayunnu  
—*Shameer NP*

sandstorm  
searching for an address  
among skyscrapers

kathir choodi paadam  
kaatil  
mohiniyattam  
— *Padma Thambatty*

ormayude  
viralpaadukallumaayi  
vayassan piano  
— *Soya VN*

ellum, poovum,  
oru urullachorum.  
achante ormakal  
— *Manoj Attingal*

rice field at harvest time  
mohiniyattam  
in the breeze

fingerprints  
laden with memories  
an old piano

sesame seeds, flowers,  
and a ball of rice,  
memories of father

#### 4. Marathi. (Puja Malushte, editor and translator)

Haiku has its own identity in Marathi literature. Haiku is written giving importance to the soul of haiku which includes the haiku moment, haiku experience and objective description in a few and appropriate words.

The 5-7-5 pattern of haiku is not strictly followed in Marathi as in Hindi.

In Japan, haiku is traditionally written in a 5-7-5 pattern. The Japanese and Marathi languages are different grammatically and alphabetically. By and large, one notices the following features in the Marathi haiku written, as:

- In three lines with minimum words. Brevity is essential.
- Colloquial language
- Rhyming 1st and 3rd or 2nd and 3rd lines.
- Divided in two parts either the 1st and the 2nd or the 2nd and 3rd lines. The two parts should be arranged in such a way that the 1st part gets a twist in the 2nd part. Each part enriches the understanding of the other.
- Seasonal word or a word that implies the season
- Ability to grasp the changes around us with the intense awareness, a kind of openness that involves sight, sound, taste, smell and touch.
- Grasping the haiku moment with the collected experience taken from life and nature.

Some small verses in four lines are written in Marathi in the form of *Charoli*, *Kanika* and *Vatratika* etc. But these forms are not haiku.

*Senryū* written in Marathi is popularly known as *baikusadrush rachana*, a composition similar to haiku.

Mrs. Shirish Pai, a well known author and poetess is the precursor of the haiku movement in Marathi. She started writing haiku in 1975. She studied Japanese haiku, its origin, changes from tanka to haiku and its nature. She has published five Marathi haiku books. She has also translated some Japanese haiku from English to Marathi. In these books she has given some articles regarding haiku and how to write haiku. These books work as a guide to new haiku writers. She has provided a preface to books of other haiku poets wherein she has outlined features of haiku. Thus, the credit goes to Shirish Pai to bring haiku to Marathi literature.

redio kharkhartoy  
surel ganehi  
kanala tras detey  
— *Shirish Pai*

radio disturbance  
the melodious song  
harsh on the ears

thoda paus pahila  
bakicha gharat rahun  
divasbhar aikala  
— *Shirish Pai*

rain—  
a little I saw  
the rest I heard

atishay thakale  
jithe rasta sampla  
tuze ghar disale  
— *Puja Malushte*

exhausted  
at the end of road  
your house

shekoti  
dur tithe  
ub ithe

—*Dr. Mahesh Keluskar*

madhyaratra houn geli tari  
mazi vruddha aai  
vachatech ahe dnanyeshwari

—*Sbri Bal Rane*

a night fire  
far away  
the warmth here

it's midnight  
and yet, my old mother  
reads the dnanyeshwari

*Dnanyeshwari-marathi* is the translation of the *Bhagavat Gita* by Sant Dnanyeshwar

## 5. Punjabi. (Arvinder Kaur, editor and translator)

Haiku entered the life of Punjabis in a big way when Parminder Sodhi published his book of translation of Japanese haiku *Japani Haiku Shayari*. Influenced by Sodhi's book Amarjit Sathi took to writing and promoting Punjabi haiku and made it his life's mission. With a handful of like-minded haijin he started an online Punjabi haiku group that has exerted a great influence on Punjabi haiku poets and has been responsible for shaping their sensibilities.

Several books, translations as well as originals, have appeared since then. International haiku conferences have been organised by Punjabi Haiku Forum in collaboration with Punjabi University Patiala. It is heartening to note that the response to the conferences has been overwhelming.

Punjabi haiku scene is extremely volatile at the moment. It seems ready for big strides and is making its presence felt in the mainstream Punjabi literature. Hardliners are putting up a resistance but haiku in Punjabi, with its emotional and cultural appeal, seems ready to overcome all obstacles. Thematically, Punjabi haiku is exploring almost all areas of life and Nature. Punjab's rich cultural heritage holds a very special and sacred place in the hearts of its haijin and hence it is written about with a lot of love and affection both by the native poets and the diaspora. A strong feel of the "here and now," the depiction of everyday harsh realities, the pining for the beloved in the romantic month of Sawan, the tender nuances of relationships, and of course the typical Punjabi rustic humour all form subjects for Punjabi haiku which has a huge readership and hence a bright future.

ghar vapsi—  
ambi de boote vich jhoot rahi  
maa di lori  
—*Sandip Chauban*

home coming—  
swinging in the mango tree  
mother's lullaby

meen h dhota chan—  
keet val kirli di  
tulvin chal  
—*Ranjit Singh Sra*

rain-washed moon—  
the lizard's balanced walk  
towards an insect

kania—  
khule verandeh 'ch faili  
basmati di khushbo

raindrops . . .  
spreading through the verandah  
the scent of basmati

mehak vihune  
diary de vich  
sukke phul  
—*Amarjit Sathi*

scentless  
in the diary  
dry flowers

jhone di luyai—  
kirti kudi de pairan heth  
tapda sooraj  
—*Harvinder Dhaliwal*

sowing paddy—  
under the young girl's feet  
the burning sun

**6. Tamil.** (A. Thiagarajan, editor and translator)

The great Subramanya Bharathi brought haiku to the attention of the Tamil public through an article he wrote in *Swadesamitran* in its 16<sup>th</sup> October 1916 issue. K. S. Venkatramani in his book *Paper Boats* (1925) wrote:

the corners cut  
paper boat  
I float again

This is perhaps the first-ever haiku written by a Tamil, though Venkatramani himself does not claim so. Sujatha in 1966 and C. Mani in 1968 translated and published some Japanese haiku for the Tamil literary magazines *Kanaiyaazhi* and *Nadai*. The period 1970-74 saw Abdul Rahman and Amudha Bharathi bring haiku sensibility further forward along the Tamil horizon. The period from 1984-1993 saw about 22 books in Tamil on haiku. The period since 1994 is significant for Tamil haiku as more than 14 books were published during this time. This was followed by approximately of 6 to 15 books each year up to 2002.

Answering the question “what is haiku?” in *India Today*, Sujatha (easily the most popular among Indian writers) says,

— three lines  
— two pictures  
— one wonder

In 1998, a haiku collection of Amudha Bharathi was given an award for the best Tamil poetry collection by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

udainthu pona  
kannaadi  
ethil naan  
— *Mu Murugesb*

broken mirror pieces  
in which one  
do I find myself?

pagalil sooriyan  
iravil nilaa  
thanga orey kinaru  
— *Pon Kumar*

the sun at daytime  
and the moon at night  
one well bears both

neeril nanaintha kuruvi  
siragu ularthum  
manalengum mazaiththuli  
— *Kannikkovil Raja*

the wet sparrow  
dries its wings  
all over the sand specks of rain

ottiyullathu  
kai kazuviya pinnam  
amma kai manam  
— *Ira Ravi*

sticking still  
even after washing my hands  
mother's hand fragrance

padiththu mudikkavillai  
paada noolai - vilakku  
karuththu vittathu

—*Erode Tamizhanban*

not yet finished  
studying the text book-  
the lamp turns black

In the olden days, oil lamps were used. When the oil or kerosene gets over, the wick begins to burn, blackening the glass which covers the lamp.

**7. Telugu.** (Rama Krishna Perugu, editor; Sathyanarayana MVS and Prof. Indira Babbelpati, translators)

Inspired by Bashō, many Indian writers adopted Zen-style and created haiku. In 1990 Gaali Nasar Reddy brought out his first haiku collection *Kanjeera*. Dr. Penna Siva Ramakrishna published a collection in 1991, followed by Ismail in 1995, and about 100 poets after that.

In 2002 at Anakapalle, a small Town in Andhra Pradesh, Dr. T. Prithv Raj founded the Indian Haiku Club and published three collections, *Nelavanka*, *Sambhodhi* and *Arati Kuteeram*.

poola curtain  
seethakokachiluka  
vachi valindhi  
— *Gaali Nasar Reddy*

floral curtain:  
perches over it  
a butterfly

deepam veligaaka  
andarikee telisindhi  
nenu ekakinani  
— *Dr. Penna Siva Ramakrishna*

lights flash  
they discover  
I'm alone

pichuka eguruthoo vochindi  
naa gadhiloki —  
aakaasaanni ventesukuni!  
— *Makineedu Surya Bhaskar*

flaps in to my room  
a sparrow brings in  
the sky

raathri vacchina vaana  
cheekatini poorthigaa kadigesindhi  
thoorupu thellabadindhi  
  
— *G. Gopalaiah*

the night rain  
rinses away the darkness  
east shimmers

bhoomikosam thannukuntunnaru  
aakaasaanni  
naaku vadilinandhuku thanks  
— *Ismail*  
*Muse India*, November 2013

they fight for the earth  
leaving the sky  
to me, thanks

## 8. Haiku in English. (Kala Ramesh, compiler)

English-language haiku has to be included too, for it's our link language and we have many poets writing in English, who are known and respected outside India. A majority of the haiku submitted were published in reputed haiku journals.

relocation—  
a tulasi plant  
on the gypsy's head  
—A.Thiagarajan, *The Heron's Nest*, March 2013

still water . . .  
a zebra runs away  
from itself  
—Aditya Ashribad, Orissa, India, *Cattails* 1, January 2014

subjunctive occasions Gita's thickness  
—Aditya Behl, Delhi, India, *Bones* 3, December 2013

hide and seek  
someone's warm palms  
on my closed eyes  
—Ajaya Mahala, Pune, India, *Mainichi Daily News*, January 03, 2014

stranded bike  
a sparrow looks at its face  
in the mirror  
—Aju Mukhopadhyay

rumors of war  
up into a darkening sky  
—a child's newsprint kite  
—Angelee Deodhar, Chandigarh, India, Third Prize, The Robert Spiess Memorial  
Haiku Award for 2003

ancient banyan . . .  
an owl shakes the night  
off its feathers  
—Anitha Varma, Kerala, India

drifting stars . . .  
a wish list flutters  
in the breeze  
—Arvinder Kaur, Chandigarh, India, *Mainichi Daily News*, Sept 2013

sidewalk café  
I smell the city  
in my coffee

—Bhavani Ramesh, Mumbai, India, *Chrysanthemums*, April 2008

mountain lake  
each splash from the oar  
shakes the moon

—Geethanjali Rajan - Chennai, India, *World Haiku Review*, August 2010

rainy morning . . .  
the wife showering abuses  
on her husband

—Hema Ravi, Chennai, India, *Frogpond*, 36.3

long days of rain -  
the gurgle of frogs ripens  
the little rice field

—Janak Sapkota, Fribourg, Switzerland, Winner, Smurfit Samhain International Haiku Prize, Ireland (2006);

overnight rain ...  
all the leaves carry  
an impression

—Jayashree Maniyil, Australia, *Creatrix Journal*, Dec 2013

monsoon sky  
the white cow  
chews a milk carton

—Johannes Manjrekar, Vadodara, India, *Haijinx* Vol. II Issue 1, 2002

dense fog . . .  
I dream walk  
my sense of I

—Kala Ramesh, Pune, India, *Simply Haiku*, v7n2, Summer 2009

deafening rain—  
to think it has no sound  
of its own

—Kashinath Karmakar, Durgapur, India, 3rd place in 18<sup>th</sup> Kusamakura International Haiku Contest 2013

end of summer  
colors fade away  
with the butterflies

—Kavya Kavuri, India, *A Hundred Gourds* 2.4, September 2013

autumn morning —  
my shadow now has  
a slight hunch

—Kumarendra Mallick, Hyderabad, India, Honourable mention, *WHR* Sep 2009

my baby's heartbeat  
next to mine  
the rhythm for our lullaby

—Nandini Nair, Pune, India, First place, *Indian Kukai* #01, September 2013

on a long way  
with me in the dark night  
these fireflies

—Neelam Dadhwal, Chandigarh, India, United Haiku & Tanka Society January 2014

brave mirror  
doesn't distort truth  
looks me in the eye

—Minal Sarosh, Ahmedabad, India, *World Haiku Review*, August 2011

incessant rain . . .  
the smell of coriander  
getting drenched

—Paresh Tiwari, Hyderabad, India, Haiku of Merit, *World Haiku Review*, Summer 2013

cold winter morning  
the pigeons coo  
for more closeness

—Poornima Laxmeshwar, Bangalore, India, *World Haiku Review*, Jan 2014

winter morning  
two butterflies  
warm the garden

—Pravat Kumar Padhy, Odisha, India, *The Heron's Nest*, Vol XIII, No. 2, June 2011

autumn sky  
patches of twilight  
in the falling leaf

—Ramesh Anand, Bangalore, India, *A Hundred Gourds* 1.2 March 2012

sunset . . .  
someone's tent peg  
on the cliff

—K. Ramesh. Chennai, India, *Presence* #41

winter rain—  
water droplets cascade  
over the leaves

—Ritaj Kalaska, Pondicherry, India, *Cattails* 1, January 2014

seat belt  
for the teddy bear too-  
the child's first flight  
—R. K. Sameer, Karnataka, India, *Kernelonline*, summer 2013

plucking  
the last red apple  
now I feel the cold  
—Rohini Gupta, Mumbai, India, *Mainichi Daily News*, 20 Feb 2013

spring solitude . . .  
an alien girl feeds  
the sparrows  
—Sandip Chauhan, Virginia, USA, *Mainichi Daily News*, May 2013

scars  
that have begun to heal . . .  
purple asters  
—Sanjukta Asopa, Belgaum, India, *DailyHaiku Cycle 16*, December 2013

child a rupee short . . .  
the ice cream vendor  
turns the corner  
—Seshu Chamarty, Hyderabad, India, *Boloji*, January, 2014

on wet earth  
a snail draws a fine line  
— a travelogue  
—Shernaz Wadia, Pune India, *Muse India*, May-June 2011

cracked pot —  
water seeps back  
into the earth  
—Shobana Kumar, Coimbatore, India

fallen leaves —  
the wind sweeps  
our courtyard  
—Shloka Shankar, Karnataka, India

temple bell:  
thinking of God  
in the midst of yoga  
—S. B. Vadivelrajan, Chennai, India, *Mainichi Shimbun*, January, 2010

dusting of dew —  
a road-sweeper scrapes  
the night away  
—Shrikaanth Krishnamurthy, Birmingham, UK, *Blithe Spirit*, Issue 24.3,

August 2014

crossroads

I wait for the cool wind

to go first

—Suhit Kelkar, India, *A Hundred Gourds* 2.4 September 2013

lonely road

she walks with me

wagging her tail

—Surbhi Grover, India, *Cattails* 1, January 2014

bustling street . . .

from a graveyard

the smell of roses

—Swaran Singh Nijhar, India, *Cattails* 1, January 2014

a caravan arrives

at my threshold

my own footfalls

—Vidur Jyoti, Delhi, India

ink puddle —

the words that

never were

—Vinay Leo R, Bangalore, India, Shiki Kukai, 1st prize, November 2013

twilight

helping mother take

baby steps

—Yesha Shah, Surat, India, Polish International Haiku Contest 2013-  
Commendation

## 9. Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts [UG], Pune (Report by Kala Ramesh)

Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts Pune, a constituent of Symbiosis International University, has introduced haiku as one of the subjects offered in their Floating Credits Program. 23 undergraduate students opted for the 30-hour haiku course module. As their guide, I decided to include both haiku and renku in the syllabus. I felt that the link-and-shift that we employ in renku would help newcomers to grasp the elusive haiku. As part of their final assessment the students were asked to create ‘kigo words,’ suitable for Indian seasons, from their own experience:

*scorching winds*

“My hometown is Baroda, Gujarat—a place where summers are extremely hot. The heat is so dominant that even the winds that blow carry hot currents and when they touch your skin, you feel as if it burnt you. These winds are pretty harmful because exposure to them could cause heat stroke, even dehydration. My *kigo* word is *scorching winds*.”—Krishna S. Gohil

*white rain/naked rain & wood chopping*

“Rains without the dark clouds. When it rains in the rainy season without dark clouds, on a bright day full of sunlight, it can be called ‘white/naked rain.’ Wood chopping is mostly done in winter season for producing fire to warm the body. So ‘wood chopping’ can be considered as an activity for the winter season.”—Disha Upadhyay

*sharbat*

“For me the word *sharbat* (sherbet) symbolizes summer and especially the summer holidays when I was in school. This is so because, growing up in Delhi, I have experienced extreme hot summers and *sharbat* was the first thing I used to have at home after a long day of playing in the sun.”—Vinamra Agarwal

*cowdung cakes*

“In India, ‘cowdung cakes’ signify late winter in the month of January when people enjoy the festival of harvest. In rural areas, during this time, the ladies of the house use cow dung cakes to ignite the fire and then dance around it. It is auspicious to keep fresh, damp cow dung cake in the centre of a *rangoli* (rice flour designs), which is usually drawn everyday outside most traditional Indian homes.”—Lavanya Tadepalli

Each student was required to select the ten best haiku they’d written during the course. Haiku such as these were among those submitted for assessment:

starry night  
a soft feeling in my hand  
of numberless sands  
—Baek Sung Hui

winter breeze  
rushing through the veins  
a numbness  
—Kemy Danecha

spring winds  
the cats try again  
to tidy their fur  
—Kayva Kavuri

quarry depth —  
pools of green  
mirrors  
—Vinamra Agarwal

Two *ginko* walks were arranged for the students as part of this module. The first was led by Mr. Kiran Purandare—a nature trail through Taljai hills with bird vocalisation for which he is famous. The second *ginko* was at the Bhamburda forest. At 5.30 am on 16<sup>th</sup> February frantic telephone calls got students to their feet! More haiku were written during and as a result of these *ginko*:

windy morning-  
dry leaves fall between  
our conversation  
—Disha Upadhyay

misty mountains—  
the road through valley  
a black Nile  
—Gokul Krishna

bright sunlight  
a shadow beside  
the shadow of a friend  
—Aviral Gupta

white mites . . .  
tunnelling their way through  
a city of sand  
—Aditi Puri

Ten haiku poems were sent by email to students and they were asked to write “a critical appreciation” of the haiku they liked best. Here are some of their outstanding responses, published in *A Hundred Gourds*, June 2013:

New Year's Day  
the center of the chocolate  
not what I expected

—Carolyn Hall, *The Heron's Nest VIII*:2

“The phrase ‘New Year’s Day’ immediately suggests that this poem is linked to celebration – celebrating a new beginning, perhaps. It gets us thinking about the kind of celebrations the poet is talking about and whether the connotation is positive or negative. As we read on, the poet shifts our attention towards ‘the center of the chocolate’ which suggests something sweet and builds our expectations. However, we realize that the outcome is utterly disappointing. After reading this haiku, the first thing which came to my mind was that it’s the beginning of a new year, and the poet has certain expectations, probably from someone who is close to her heart and he/she has failed to live up to them. It can also suggest an unexpected rough patch in a new couple’s relationship. Overall, this haiku aroused a lot of curiosity within me and even after it ended; it kept me wondering about what actually went wrong. The poet successfully creates suspense through these lines and the simplicity of words makes it more emphatic.”—Ritika Moolchandani

The thief left it behind:  
the moon  
at my window

—Ryokan (as translated in *The Enlightened Heart: An Anthology of Sacred poetry* (1993) by Stephen Mitchell

“I have chosen the above haiku because the three simple lines have a deep meaning in them. The 10 words clearly define the poet’s thoughts.

The line “the thief left it behind” portrays the backdrop that the thief has come and robbed the house. But he has left something behind. Our minds go into the thought about what he could have left behind. The wild guesses the readers make is the essence of this haiku. The line “the moon at the window” shows that its night and the room is empty. The person can only see the moon at the window and nothing else because the house has been robbed.

This haiku has put across the simplicity of the words used. It clearly shows what the poet is trying to convey. I got inspired by this haiku. Even I have used simple words to write my haiku.”—Kavya Kavuri

migrating geese —  
the things we thought we needed  
darken the garage

—Chad Lee Robinson, *The Heron's Nest XIII*:1

“A flock of migrating geese following their natural instinct to fly south represents an ordered sense of freedom. Humans driven by their need to accumulate material things, end up with a clutter that acts as a weight, holding them in one place. Robinson juxtaposes weightlessness with gravity, while contrasting the image of an illuminated, open sky with the shadowy interior of the garage.”—Aviral Gupta

## 10. Children's Haiku.

For some time now, Kala Ramesh has been conducting haiku workshops for children in schools, in Children's Literary Festivals like the Bookaroo and Junior Writer's Bug, the Katha Utsav—an interactive two-day workshop that took place at Delhi along with CBSE schools and says children take to haiku like fish takes to water! She says she has learnt so much from them and enjoys the interaction and the joy of seeing their eyes sparkle as they discover the Japanese Masters and the Contemporary haiku poets from all over the world.

The haiku showcased here are from Katha-CBSE Creative writing workshops, Bookaroo Children's Literary Festival in Delhi, Kashmir and Pune, and The British School, Delhi.

yawning wide . . .

I watch the leaf settle

on a bed of brown

—R. Hariharan, India, grade 9, age 14, *Cattails* 1, January 2014

shining sun . . .

the gurgling of water

in the forest

—Shaurya Giri, India, age 10

stars—

the campfire burning

down below

—Ananya Maskara, std 6, age 11

trekking—

I follow the waterfall

into the woods

—Rishabh Jain, std 6, age 11

crinkled leaves

in all different colours—

heavy rain

—Daniela Hall, India, std 6, age 10

a moonlit night

the growl of a dog

awakens me

—Udai Vir Singh, India, std 6, age 11

buzzing bees—

cherries redden the trees

until they fall

—Shaina Sharma, India, std 7, age 12

the sun  
rises to the mountains—  
light streams down  
—Joel Shah, India, age 12

snow-peaked mountains—  
the tall bare trees  
by the river  
—Sanya Chandel, India, std. 7, age 12

## A Closing Word on Rabindranath Tagore (Report by Kala Ramesh)

Mention Rabindranath Tagore to an Indian — not just to a Bengali — and his/her heart would swell with pride. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Chakravarti Rajagolachari, Srimathi Rukmani Arundale and a host of such creative geniuses, Tagore stands tall along with these giant personalities.

What about his poems? What was that magic? With simple words, but deep in thought, he fashioned a garland of poems — full of fragrant blossoms.

*Stray Birds* contain Tagore's ideas on nature, man and his environment as he sits at his window and the 'stray birds' of summer sing and fly away. These short, sometimes merely one-line poems are often just an image or the distillation of a thought — but they stay in the mind and do not fly away as easily as the birds. The variety of subjects, on which the mind of Tagore's dwells, is amazing — and all his variety is reflected in these vignettes.<sup>6</sup>

Here are some excerpts from *Stray Birds*:

Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away.  
And yellow leaves of autumn, which have no songs, flutter and fall with a sigh.

By plucking her petals you do not gather the beauty of the flower

It is the tears of the earth that keeps her smiles in bloom

If you shed tears when you miss the sun, you also miss the stars

What you are you do not see, what you see is the shadow

The stars are not afraid to appear like fireflies

The sparrow is sorry for the peacock at the burden of its tail

The infant flower opens its bud and cries,  
“Dear world, please do not fade”

The woodcutter's axe begged for its handle from the tree.  
The tree gave it

“How far are you from me, O Fruit?”  
“I am hidden in your heart, O Flower”

The little flower lies in the dust  
It sought the path of the butterfly

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6. Notes below taken from the sleeve notes of *Stray Birds*, MacMillan Pocket Tagore Edition.