

the heart of a haiku

a space for a little poem
to weave its magic!

part 3

the cut :: the *kire*

Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub;
It is the center hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.

Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore profit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.

Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu - chapter 11
(Tr. by [Gia-fu Feng and Jane English](#))

As a student of Hindustani classical vocal music, I have spent a lot of time pondering how to effectively use 'space' in music, which is very different from the way it is shown in dance. In music, one way is to go up and down the octave showing both space and time. But it is equally important to accentuate the spaces between the notes. These full, half or quarter pauses or silences between notes give a fillip to the emotional quotient when a melodic piece is performed. In truth, all art forms demand this way of utilizing space.

This space exists naturally between notes, dance movements, brush strokes or words. An artist only attempts to perfect this technique, to give the dramatic and aesthetic touch needed, to make it visible not only to a connoisseur, but also to a lay person.

The Japanese have a very beautiful aesthetic tool called the '*ma*'.

Which means: where there is clutter, even valuable things lose their value. Where there is too much, nothing stands out. The essence of Japanese aesthetic is this concept called '*ma*' (pronounced "maah") — the pure, and indeed the essential, void between all "things." A total lack of clutter, *ma* is like a holder within which things can exist, stand out and have a meaning.

For more on the concept of *ma*, [click here](#).

The cut: known as the *kire* in haiku is *the most important technique and aesthetic tool* we use when writing a haiku. What does it do? It creates that space between the images. In a minimalistic poem how can one tell a story —where is the place for narration? The cut known as the '*kire*' does this magic! It helps the author to link from one image to the next by creating a 'cut', which in turn creates a 'space.'

The *kire* forms the backbone and can be called the soul in haiku. A *kire* sometimes can happen more than once in a haiku, but happening once is a must — bringing into focus the images that run parallel and the

space between them. Please observe, in the example given below, both the *connection* between two images and the distance between them; otherwise the poem doesn't come together as a haiku.

If we look again at Basho's famous haiku, we see that he has clearly linked the two images — the crow alights on a bare branch against the background of an autumn nightfall.

The connection between the two or more images happens only when the images are close but not too close, nor too far apart. For example, supposing we change the third line to:

on a bare branch
a crow has alighted ...
the leafless tree

The first image — a crow alighting on a bare branch — is too close to the second image of a leafless tree, hence there is no twist or surprise and the haiku falls flat.

With this third line:

on a bare branch
a crow has alighted ...
science project

The two images — a crow alighting on a bare branch and a science project — have *no* connection, so the haiku does not work. For a haiku to **connect** we need the images neither too close (as in example 1), nor too far and disconnected (as in ex. 2.)

This haiku is one of my all time favourites, and it shows the 'kire' most beautifully — with just the right amount of gap for a good leap!

The thief left it behind:
the moon
at my window

— Ryokan

Here are some examples of contemporary haiku with a very effective 'cut'. Good impact. The space between the two images shown in each haiku *is not too far or too close*. Just the right amount of space to create that bridge in the reader's mind — something like seeing two or three 'shots' of a filming unit, which help the director and the cinematographer in carrying the storyline further.

temple tank —
near the stone bull
a real bull

— Ajaya Mahala, Pune

A clear cut after L1. Also notice the play on the image: the stone bull (which is worshipped) and a real bull (which is perhaps loitering around in search of food?) The irony, the reality of life, is given here in just nine words.

train whistle
a blackbird hops
along its notes

— Alan Summers, UK

Apart from the 'kire' (the cut) also look at the internal rhythm in this haiku. Reading it aloud, do you hear and feel the rhythmic beat of the bird hopping along?

Please note: the *kire* can occur anywhere in a haiku, and there can be more than one *kire* in a haiku. This point will be taken up in detail in the following weeks.

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temple tank: *Daily Haiku Cycle 17*

train whistle: *Presence 47*

Passionate about taking haiku to everyday spaces, **Kala Ramesh** initiated the 'HaikuWALL India,' where she gets graffiti artists to paint haiku on city walls. As an external faculty member of the Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts she teaches undergrads haiku and other allied Japanese short forms of poetry.