

the heart of a haiku

a space for a little poem
to weave its magic!

An introduction to essays on *how to haiku*

Haiku is a Japanese art form that is more than 400 years old. Nature poetry, that seems to have fascinated not only Indian poets like Rabindranath Tagore and Subramanya Bharathi, at the beginning of the last century . . . but poets from all over the world.

Can one call haiku a word painting, something frozen in time?

In film jargon we could refer to each haiku as “a shot”, for it captures more than a frozen moment. A poem in just about seven to ten words shows the passing of time, the transient, the fleeting and thus, brings into focus the creative force working in nature. So naturally there is craft, which leads to technique and rules.

the sea darkens
a wild duck's call
faintly white

Matsuo Basho
Tr by Makoto Ueda

Can a duck's call be white? Basho has used synesthesia so effectively here. This makes us sit up, take notice. It makes the poem memorable. This image (faintly white) links to line 1 which talks about the 'darkening sea' so all that I as a reader get is a white duck, perhaps a migrating bird getting farther away, and its honk simply looks 'white'.

The truth of the moment seen in an extraordinary way! Each word has an important and crucial place in the poem, since in haiku there is no room for redundancy.

The four masters of Japanese haiku are: Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), Yosa Buson (1716-1784), Kobayashi Issa (1762-1826), and Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902.) And the only woman haiku poet who is as renowned is Chiyo-ni.

Matsuo Basho, was recognized for his works in the collaborative *haikai no renga*. The first verse of a renga was called a hokku, which was the only stand alone verse in the whole poem. Basho recognising the hokku's potential to stand on its own legs began to explore 'hokku' as an individual poem. This we can safely say was the beginning of a kind of poetry that was to grip the imagination of the people, from all over the world, from all walks of life.

Later Masaoka Shiki renamed hokku as “haiku”. Shiki, greatly influenced by the realism movement that was sweeping through European thought, introduced what is popularly known as shasei – a sketch from nature.

India is waking up to this art form in a big way. A reputed online haiku journal –A Hundred Gourds, recently asked me to write about ‘Haiku in India’ and was featured in their June 2013 issue. <http://ahundredgourds.com/ahg23/feature01.html>

I’ll be following this short introduction with a series of haiku columns — just for you!

Wake up to your senses, wake up to the life around you ... welcome to the world of haiku in all its avatars.

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Pune
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