

WHO NEEDS POETRY?



AMITAVA KAR

WHENEVER the question "Does poetry have a social function?" is raised, I have to argue that poetry is central to our civilisation because it makes us think.

When the purveyors of bottom-line thinking puts a price tag on everything from a mountain to a river, poetry reminds us that they are more than items on a spreadsheet. Not everything that counts can be counted.

There are poems that, in their subtle but powerful way, reveal to us areas of our own experiences that, for reasons both personal and societal, we had lost sight of, forever changing the way we look at and listen to the world. It is this possibility that makes poetry as necessary as a paycheck.

To read "No one leaves home unless /home is the mouth of a shark" by the Nairobi-born, London-raised, 24-year-old Warsan Shire, is to be reminded not just of the futility and the horror of war but also of the helplessness of people. Referring to the unthinkable choices refugees must take, Shire writes: "No one puts their children in a boat/unless the water is safer than the land."

Blevies of new research show that reading poetry develops empathy. There are personal, apolitical lyrics that make us think again about the dynamics of our day-to-day relationships with beings, from humans to the wild things that we keep forgetting are out there, where the chaos ends.

A poet wants to say so much in so few words. That's the beginning of restraint. When Carl Sandburg writes, "The fog comes/on little cat feet," in



PHOTO: AFP

just seven words, he gives life to a natural phenomenon endowing it with character. Students of all forms of writing could benefit from taking into account this indispensable dimension of well-chosen words. Baudelaire invites us to be poets even in prose.

"Nothing is more important to the future of humanity than the freedom to make new ideas," says Dorothea Lasky, poet and faculty at Columbia School of Arts. "I would argue that the act of writing poetry is important for the creation of those new ideas."

In Iran, school children are taken to the grave of Hafez on a regular basis

where they show respect to the late poet and philosopher. Why don't we bring Nazrul or Tagore into the lives of our children?

Plenty of things need to happen in the world and in this country, like putting a stop to invading countries for oil, reducing inequality and establishing the rule of law. Can poetry make that happen?

Poet Robert Bly addressed this concern in a conversation with Bill Moyers, journalist and former White House Press Secretary in the Johnson administration. "No, it's never been able to do anything of that sort. It

merely speaks to the soul, so the soul can remember—so it's quite proper to have all the poems against the war. And it's proper not to be disappointed if nothing changes."

Why must we read or write it then? Well, ask the Guantanamo prisoner that, who, when denied pen and paper, used pebbles to scratch poems on Styrofoam cups. If he sought "a momentary stay against confusion," and found it in poetry, I would say, job well done. Healing is not the domain only of prescriptive drugs. In fact, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) directs to the scientific evidence of the

efficacy of poetry for the healing of patients, including those suffering from brain cancer.

There's more. John Coleman, in the article *The Benefits of Poetry for Professionals* in the *Harvard Business Review* makes the case for hiring poets as managers because poets are original systems thinkers. They look at our most complex problems and are able to come up with simple solutions.

Even the sciences have deeply-rooted relationships with poetry. Scientists in the pre-Socrates era wrote in verse. Erasmus Darwin's poem *The Temple of Nature* outlined a theory of evolution. Einstein calls mathematics "the poetry of logical ideas."

Poetry is what language alone can do. In a two-line, poem called *To You*, Whitman asks two rhetorical questions: Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me?

And why should I not speak to you? It seems entirely self-evident to Whitman that two strangers passing each other ought to be able to loiter and speak, to connect, and even become friends. How often do we pass someone we know - let alone a stranger - without even looking?

In January 1842, Ralph Waldo Emerson's firstborn child, Waldo, died of scarlet fever at the age of five. He had "touched with his lively curiosity every trivial fact and circumstance in the household." When the nine-year-old Louisa came to his house to ask about Waldo, all Emerson could say was "Child, he is dead."

Child, he is dead. In 2015, it's Aylan. The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

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A discouraging message to SOUTH ASIAN EXPORTERS

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

SEVERAL media reports have observed that on the basis of prima facie evidence of dumping of jute products from Bangladesh and Nepal, the Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) of India has launched an investigation to assess whether anti-dumping duty should be imposed on such imports from these two countries so that India's competing domestic industry is not harmed. In layman's terms, dumping is selling a product below its cost of production with a design to drive the competitors out of the market and then to recoup the loss in a less competitive market. And an anti-dumping duty is a tariff imposed on imports dumped by foreign manufacturers to counterbalance the damage caused by the dumping.

While in theory anti-dumping duty is nothing but a response to unfair commercial practices of foreign manufacturers, many trade analysts are sceptical about its rationale, mode of imposition and impact. The theory of dumping is premised on the idea that the manufacturer resorting to dumping has to be economically established enough to be capable of sustaining temporary loss or at least of having its goods exported to more than one market. This is to ensure that loss in one market is offset by profit in one or more markets. Secondly, a manufacturer resorting to dumping does not only need to eliminate existing competitors but also make sure that future entrants in the market face hurdles in entering it. After all, if a new entrant enters the market and can compete effectively, the manufacturer of a dumped product has to continue to resort to dumping.

Many trade analysts believe that

when globally tariff and non-tariff barriers are declining, anti-dumping duties and other so-called responses to unfair trade practices of foreign manufacturers are used only as a backdoor to protect domestic industries. The fact that during the early years of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) - the predecessor of the World Trade Organization (WTO) - just a handful of countries had any domestic law on

case for imposing anti-dumping duties on imports. In view of many analysts, this epitomised a desire to protect domestic products and was not necessarily a justifiable response to unfair commercial practice by exporters.

In the case of India, this anti-dumping duty is being imposed at a time when India has virtually given zero tariff access (save a very limited number of excepted products) to

practices of exporters but by their ability to compete efficiently.

Assuming that there is an economic case for this issue, the bigger problem is with the way the domestic regulatory bodies investigate the allegations of dumping. The laws of the WTO permit investigations into alleged cases of dumping. They also permit the imposition of anti-dumping duties when there is evidence backing the allegations, but are only subject to

alleging dumping would only be investigated if domestic producers making the allegation account for at least 25 percent of the total domestic production. However, it has been found that in some cases, investigations have been launched although the petitioners have failed to prove that they do fulfil this minimum threshold.

India is one of the most frequent users of anti-dumping investigations and imposers of anti-dumping duties. In fact, this investigation into jute imports from India would be a déjà vu for some trade observers. In January 2004, Bangladesh had to request consultations with their neighbour concerning an anti-dumping measure imposed by India on imports of lead acid batteries from Bangladesh. Bangladesh alleged that some aspects of the investigation by the Indian authorities leading to the imposition of the anti-dumping duty did not comply with relevant laws of the WTO. In fact, this was the first and so far only dispute involving an LDC member state as a principal party to a WTO dispute. The dispute was ultimately settled mutually, before it reached the stage of judicial settlement by the WTO panel.

Indian authorities should also not forget that Bangladesh, India, and Nepal - being members of the SAFTA - have vowed to increase intra-SAFTA trade. This investigation and potential imposition of an anti-dumping duty would send a dismaying signal to business communities. Exporters from other SAFTA member countries could feel that whenever they have a large share in the Indian market, there might be the risk that their entry in that market would be curtailed not by economic factors, but by the domestic protectionist impulses of India.

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PHOTO: STAR

anti-dumping and now most of the WTO members have anti-dumping laws, feeds to this cynicism about the not so legitimate motive for resorting to anti-dumping. Similarly, during the recent global financial crisis in 2007, the WTO Secretariat found an increasing tendency of WTO members to launch investigations to examine the

exporters from Least Developed Country members of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), and this includes exporters from both Nepal and Bangladesh. Thus, it is not improbable that this investigation on exports from Bangladesh and Nepal has been triggered not by unfair trade

fulfilling certain requirements. For instance, the WTO laws require that the dumping of imported products must cause injury to the domestic industry, and there must be a direct connecting link between the alleged dumping and injury to the domestic industry. Similarly, it is a legal requirement that any petition from domestic producers

It is not improbable that the investigation on exports from Bangladesh and Nepal has been triggered not by unfair trade practices of exporters but by their ability to compete efficiently.

QUOTABLE Quote

FRANZ KAFKA

Capitalism is a system of dependencies, which run from within to without, from without to within, from above to below, from below to above. All is dependent, all stands in chains. Capitalism is a condition of the soul and of the world.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Kids
- Frog's cousin
- Fix one's bearings
- Take apart
- DNA info
- Long sandwiches
- Surgery souvenir
- Electrical unit
- January event
- Refutation
- Broadcast
- Sluggish's need
- By way of
- Stab in the back
- Tear asunder
- Pictured
- Flexed
- Sailing
- Bars on a product
- Dagger handle
- Reach
- Wild about
- Like some boxes

DOWN

- Steady run
- Valuable rock
- Immoral act
- Donkey sound
- Play direction
- Mix up
- Arizona city
- Lennon's wife
- Throw in
- Fawn's mother
- Desire
- Shrinks back
- blanche
- Add zest to
- Sully
- Bar bill
- Calendar box
- Young fellow
- African language
- Entertain at bedtime
- Changes chemically
- Davis of "Jezebel"
- Checkout act
- Letter after upsilon
- Sought office
- Many a time
- Granola bit
- Conk out
- Final part

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	U	I	T	E	E	L	I	T	E
Y	K	E	A	S	T	P	I	N	T
C	U	B	E	R	O	O	T		
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M	O	T	O	R	E	G	R	E	T
E	N	S	U	E	D	G	E	N	E
L	A	W	E	Y	E	D			
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N	O	T	E	S	S	T	O	N	Y

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

HIS OWN DESK, HIS OWN FILE CABINET. WHAT'S NEXT?

HIS OWN STALL

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

LET'S GO, HAMMIE! DON'T FORGET, THIS IS OUR DAY TO WORK THE CONCESSION STAND!

WHAT?? ALL THE PARENTS HAVE TO TAKE A TURN, DARBY.

I'M READY. BE CAREFUL NOT TO TRIP OVER YOUR FATHER'S LOWER LIP ON YOUR WAY OUT.