



## **The Future of Literature: Literature in the Future – Problems for the Linguistic Semioticians**

(A Short Communication)

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### **1. Writing and the New Challenges**

Teaching of languages and linguistics now cannot avoid looking at the field of literature. It could never do so, whether in Ancient Greece or in Ancient India. But with the introduction of E-Zines on the internet, or thanks to the Audiobooks as well as the story-telling platforms hitherto unheard of, such as Blogging, or Instagram (where we are flooded with ‘Instapoetry’ these days) and with the introduction of the smartphone with various Apps, the Kindle platform, or the Tablet, the Satellite and Cable-on-demand Television, creative writing has assumed a challenge that is unprecedented. Language analysis will also have to evolve or mould itself accordingly because these platforms and contexts must be taken into account when we look at the newer expression patterns, abbreviations, lexical coinages etc.

Added to that the market segmentation as well as algorithmic marketing, and you would notice that there are many game-changing happenings in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that pose a rare challenge.

With the rise of literacy figures all over the world, the demand for suitable reading materials has also increased manifold. The genres and books that disappeared once have begun making appearance again today.

“The old rainforests of culture have been cleared away, and literature, with its prehensile hands and brachiating arms, now reaches for heights it can no longer climb and stares into distances it can no longer see”. - said R. Scott Bakker in his blog titled ‘Three Pound Brain’.

Added to that has emerged the AI-driven or AI-based writing boards where one could order a ChatBot to write a report by mixing the styles of Shakespeare and Milton. What that result could be was not explored earlier but these are all new possibilities and challenges for both literary critics and linguists.

If one thinks about an ‘Imaginary Dialogue,’ we come across the possible scene such as this:

- “Where have all the readers gone?” - Ask many authors. But more than the authors, it is the question asked by the publishers and Book Fair people.
- “Who has the time to read?” – Someone tries to answer in a weak voice, “Earlier, readers tried *finding* in writing what they did not find in classrooms or in the family - in life. But we don’t depend on literature to find anything any more.”
- That’s true, I sighed. Because there are whole giant industries that have come up on the art and science of finding – to find an address, or a long-lost friend, or even a forgotten author, we are used to *google* now. For smarter searchers, there are more apt *engines* now.
- “Wondering, in that case – has Literature become a *luxury* item now, no longer needed by the common man – who once had only authors to let their imagination run far and wide?”
- “Well, we could assign a new task to literature. It does not have to find and discover now – but it can still be of great help for the readers. It can dig out, stain, or in other words, it can do *sorting*.”

## **2. The Demand and Supply of Writing**

There is a ‘Demand-and-Supply’ aspect of creative endeavours of all kinds now. In fact, ‘*Need*’ has been the driving force deciding on the nature of the economic connection of supply and demand earlier. Good writing, grand theatre, soothing music or great piece of art were all perceived as our ‘need’ in life. So writing and writers thrived on that until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw grand collapses, bloody wars and great betrayals, as also the industrial revolution. It is this industrial revolution that highlighted ‘*Want*’ as the main economic driver.

Assuming that Writing turned into luxury goods, the consequence is that they must satisfy the requirements of the *Age of Want* now. The publishers would now be looking for expansion of their market bases by identifying the potential buyers in bulk. That would enable them to hit ‘targets’ they could never definitively define, for which they depended entirely on their ‘hunches’ than on any kind of analytics or hard data-base. Making and Unmaking of many big-time publishers and selling outlets could be explained based on this approach taken vis-à-vis Writing.

In an *Information Age*, the mechanism or ability to hit upon what is 'right' is the biggest challenge – the right quote, or the right direction, or the right step, including the right adjective and expression. Prior to this age, or just when the entertainment industry was taking up the case of making use of writing to kindle the spectators' imagination, the challenge was to locate or identify the 'want' – the *gap*. The assignment of the authors 'employed' by the newspaper houses or the movie moguls was to identify what common man 'lacks' in life – money, romance, show of opulence, or even the unknown and unholy connections and networks in the underworld, etc. - for which he is ready to spend time and money. The Pulp Fictions and the Best-Sellers thrived on this ability to supply those images.

### **3. The Algorithm of Selling and Buying**

The *Suppliers* and *Buyers* of books are like the *Senders* and *Receivers* in communication. The original *Speakers* of this communication in the matrix are the authors who revel on this possibility of less-than-stable connections between senders and receivers.

So theoretically, the writer could always take a position that he 'writes for himself,' according to their whim and fancy, or according to what they perceive as gaps and wants. These authors thus believed that the uncertainties or the *inefficiencies* of the system would somehow allow them to 'find their reader.'

The buyers-receivers then often depended on the book-ads as well as favourable reviews to 'settle' for less than stable communicative relationships and so be more open to literary experiences by taking risks to buy/read new authors.

The Suppliers-Publishers, in collusion with magazines and newspapers, depended heavily on the manipulations to get favourable reviews for their books. The quotable quotes in the Guardian or in the Times Literary Supplement were fed back on the book covers to promote their books as best-sellers.

But during the last two decades, the likes of Amazon and Flipkart have changed the game by adding buttons like 'You might also like...' feature below a book and its summary to target buyers with some kind of preference parsing algorithms that 'helped' them with *exactly* what they want. These marketing algorithms are there to stay until someone comes up with smarter sales strategies on the web-platform.

### **4. Revelations and Recollections in Ancient India: *Shruti* and *Smriti***

'Texts' in the ancient Indian tradition were classified *Shruti* (meaning 'that which is heard') – a number of Sanskrit texts regarded as '*revelation*' and

Smriti or, 'recollection' (John Grimes et al 2006: 35-36), i.e. texts that are based on memory, or traditions, where the role of the latter has been to explain, interpret and clarify primary revelations, e.g. *Puranas*, Manu-Smriti, the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya and the Tantric treatises.

Similar to *Shruti* and *Smriti*, the Buddhist Tibetan versions of Indian writings were also classified into *Kanjur* (*bka' gyur* - the commandments of Buddha) and *Tanjur* (*bstan'gyur* - doctrinal teaching given by subsequent teachers), including the Tibetan versions of the Sanskrit *Nitisastras*.

The multiple references and nesting techniques of Indian texts served as a strategy for later authors to gain entry and acceptance. It is a separate matter that both Greko-Roman and Indian tradition believed that writing or *Kriti* would lead people to shun dependence on their memory, or *Smriti*.

A question would then come up before us, and we cannot simply wish it away: Can Literature (or films or theatre, for that matter) be viewed as 'Manipulation'? Not that it has never happened. Not that none has thought about such a possibility.

In ancient India, the trend of writing as 'Someone else' was as common as expanding a known text and story. Numerous plays and fictions/upakhyanas have come out of the epics any way.

Recall that there were thirteen Chandidases and three Vidyapatis in the Medieval period in the Magadhan languages, Bangla and Maithili.

However, authors of later-day texts went on adding their writing to create multiple nesting in the already existing and acclaimed texts, as pointed out by Romesh C. Dutt (1910) in his *The Ramayana & Mahabharata*:

"The real Epic ends with the war and the funeral of the deceased warriors. Much of what follows in the original Sanscrit poem is either episodical or comparatively recent interpolation. The great and venerable warrior Bhishma, still lying on his death-bed, discourses for the instruction of the newly crowned Yudhishtir on various subjects like Duties of Kings, the Duties of the Four Castes, and the Four Stages of Life. He repeats the discourse of other saints, of Bhrgu and Bharadwaja, of Manu and Brihaspati, of Vyasa and Suka, of Yajnavalkya and Janaka, of Narada and Narayana. He explains *Sankhya* philosophy and *Yoga* philosophy, and lays down laws of Marriage, the laws of Succession, the rules of Gifts, and the rules of Funeral Rites. He preaches the cult of Krishna, and narrates endless legends, tales, traditions, and myths about sages and saints, gods and mortal kings. All this is told in two Books containing about twenty-two thousand

couplets, and forming nearly one- fourth of the entire Sanscrit Epic!”

## 5. Literature as Reverberations

Traditionally, everybody agrees that teaching literature (especially Literature of English, or Literary Studies – such as Commonwealth Literature or Asian Studies, mediated through English is a challenging task. Because there has been a downpour of writings in English from so many continents and on so many devices and platforms, studying literature in English poses some additional problems. There have been many recent suggestions as to how to overcome this challenge, as the one suggested by Nur & Nor (2023) through what they call ‘The Systematic Literature Review’ (SLR) activity in what they call a PRISMA framework, where the SLR follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). To give them the credit due, they present us a graphical representation of the complete process of doing a systematic review and meta-analysis, including the search for relevant articles, the filtering of them based on certain criteria, and their quality assessment. They, however, narrow the problems down to only three factors: student-related challenges, teacher-related challenges, and external-related challenges. But to my mind, the key gap and limitations in their approach is that we have not yet learned to focus on the new challenges of creativity which I elaborated here.

My idea is that the readers like to feel a *reverberation* as they read a text – a sort of partial familiarity with the story or narrative style to feel as if the story is ‘owned’ by them – it was their story being told by an author. Resonance that gets reverberated a la Bachelard would say that our texts must have the ability to evoke, suggest, or rekindle images, memories, and emotions – be an echo of them, so much so that the readers find a familiarity of sorts.

This twin concept of *resemblances* and *familiarity* have been the features that have been heavily used in ancient Indian tradition. The way our stories end must leave the readers gasping for more or leave them with a desire or an imagination of the afterworld.

Similarly, the way a creative text begins in our tradition shows the strategies of foregrounding a familiar scene or an image evolving before our eyes. Often on, we can even ‘smell’ a story before it is fully revealed. The trick is then to act or move in the opposite direction to what the reader would expect, in a manner that would be shocking – as if to open a new vista or venue before her that she could never imagine. Taking from the familiar plane to the unfamiliar arena is the strategy we often used.

Therefore, we need a more robust graphic-theoretical approach to map the newer kinds of creativity and bring that in to analyze the generation of texts and their impacts.

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