

WHY DO I WRITE?

By V. G. Nand

Obviously, the answer to this question is not as easy to find as answers to questions like ‘Why do I eat ?’ or ‘Why do I sleep ?’ or, ‘Why do I work ?’ or ‘Why do I wear clothes ?’ and a host of such other questions which are very basic and are the concern of humanity at large. Besides there are not many who are involved in the business of writing and that too, writing that is noteworthy and which would lead one to be recognised as a writer of note. Of course, there are still large number of people involved in writing, trying to express themselves, their creative abilities, thinking abilities, their views and good many of them do it nicely, too. Yet all of them make a small portion of the world’s population. Whatever it be, the question concerns this small number of expressive souls. I, myself, cannot make any claim to be a writer with just half-a-dozen translations, two books of poetry and a third one by way of memoirs in the offing, but strangely enough, I find myself belonging to the category of strugglers among the expressive souls. Let us however, concede that while the talent to write may be domain of selected few, the urge to express is common to mankind. Everyone wants to express but few succeed.

As I start thinking on this question, my mind travels back to the times when I was just a growing kid and God has been quite kind to me in one thing; He has given me the gift of a strong memory. And you need good memory for any writing be it imaginary or, factual. I can recall many things since I was about three. The war years, the fund-collecting blue-bus that moved in the lanes and streets of Indore, a British policeman occasionally walking along a street or trotting away on a horse, a musical band leading a marriage procession playing a popular tune from some mythological film like Ram Rajya, a boy going house to house selling butter and biscuits – six biscuits and an oval shaped small slab of butter for one anna – six paise from 1957 – an old beggar woman with crooked feet condemned as a witch of whom we children were afraid, my father haggling over purchase of wheat available at two and half rupees for a bag of forty sers – kilos came in the late fifties, and a large number of such things. And I was quite amused by such things and though I could not understand the

meaning of dearness at that age I would listen with great interest when father used to talk of prices going up very fast every month. For example, the Lipton White Lable Tea pack of one pound which was available for twelve annas would go up to fourteen annas the next month and things like that.

When I was about four my father taught me the alphabet of Marathi and a little later of English. I picked up Hindi by listening to people talking in that language. Illness and particularly small-pox infection that damaged my right eye giving me opacity prevented me from going to school. Upto fifth standard I read at home. A teacher was engaged for that purpose. From the beginning I was quick at languages and I was admitted to school straightaway in the sixth form by appearing for the fifth form examinations directly. Luckily, there was such a provision under rules then. I distinctly remember to have read a long poem in Marathi namely 'BANDISHALA', of the poet Yeshwant even before joining school. I had also read a story with the heading 'DAAG' perhaps by the great Marathi writer Gangadhar Gadgil. At school my favourite subjects were all languages and was almost a duffer in Maths and Science, managing History and Geography with some difficulty. All the same I loved reading poems and stories in any of the aforementioned three languages. In the sixth form I got and read a Marathi translation of Rob-in-Hood which I immensely enjoyed. So did I 'PRAVASI' a novel by the eminent Marathi Novelist of those times N.S. Phadake. Both these I had got from the library of our school, namely, Maharaja Shivajirao Marathi Middle School. Having read I wanted to talk about these books but I found no one around with whom I could interact. My passion for reading remained unabated. Unfortunately, the school library did not have so many books that you could lay hands on; nor were there many public libraries from where you could borrow conveniently. There was just one with the name – Indore General Library but I was not its member and at home father discouraged me from reading literary material as he thought it would distract me from studies. Such orthodoxical thinking on the part of parents of those days, with all its noble intention undoubtedly exercised a negative influence on school boys and girls in those days. So I had to get something from others, classmates, for example, and read secretly lest father saw me indulging into such distraction and rebuke me which he often did because of his being short-tempered. Rather

surprising, for his early upbringing was in Pune which is and even in the past was a cultural and educational centre of high-standing. I did not like his approach even at that tender age and my comments are not a product of post those years by way of retrospection but of those times. What I have said in the foregoing lines now was said by me in those days – mostly to myself and at times to a close friend or classmate. I have always felt the urge to express myself and I am sure many people have such an urge but have not been able to do it either for want of keen desire on their part or, some other factors which override such an urge.

I am an extrovert and greatly interested in human affairs dealing especially with emotions and ideas and am enthusiastic to talk about events, happenings or my reactions to what I had read and so on. Now a question arises, talk with whom? There must be a listener and it is difficult to find someone who may be interested in listening to you. All the same it should not deter anybody from ruminating over what one may have seen, heard, may have felt or, from reading which is quite a pleasurable activity.

Along with studies I continued to read other material mostly literary and some non-literary, but highly intellectual and thought-provoking. By the time I finished high-school I had read something of Sumitranandan Pant, Harivanshrai Bachhan, Jaishankar Prasad noted Hindi poets and some stories especially of Premchand. In those formative years I was greatly influenced by the romantic poetry of Bachhan and Pant. I read ‘NISHA NIMANTRAN’, ‘MILAN YAMINI’ and some stanzas of ‘MADHUSHALA’ of Bachhan and I found myself flying like kite in the romantic air breathed by these books. I was simply fascinated by Pant’s GRAMMYA and especially, Gram Yuvati a poem which then created in my mind the picture perfectly of a sensuous woman whose proximity anyone would desire. Prasad’s AANSOO set me thinking about the impact sorrow made on one’s mind, one’s life. Munshi Premchand’s stories removed the curtain and showed the various layers of social setting of his times and exposed countless shades of human nature and human behaviour.

Post matriculation I got acquainted with Charles Dickens and Shakespeare. For Intermediate Arts examinations we had these two authors. When I finished reading Dickens’ ‘A TALE OF

TWO CITIES' I came to know the meaning of true love and realised that sacrifice is the governing condition of love. Sydney Carton who does not get his lady love but for whom he sacrifices his life so that she could be happy with her man to this day symbolises for me a true-lover. Along with Dickens we had Shakespeare's tragic-comedy 'THE MERCHANT OF VENICE'. Many who read the play would sympathise with Antonio very strongly and abuse Shylock for his cruelty, however, when I finished reading it I found myself somewhat sympathising with him despite his cruelty. I felt Shylock was, and is, a mighty slap Shakespeare has posted on the face of the Christian world. I had not studied the history of England and Europe, nor had I read the history of English Literature then but these were the impressions that were made by these two books on the mind of a fellow still in his teens. Later on, I read more plays of Shakespeare and felt that Shakespeare's plays are not just presentations of poetic imagination highly charged with emotions, but in some plays he sets you thinking also. MACBETH's emotionally surcharged soliloquy 'Life is but a walking shadow a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' has behind it great struggle, great fight against opposing forces and his gathering a sense of wasteness upon the death of Lady Macbeth. It is pregnant with meaning and not a surface level generalisation. When HAMLET towards the end of his third soliloquy says, 'Thus conscious makes cowards of us all', he sets the reader's mind thinking inwardly and introspectively.

Around this time I also happened to read Tolstoy's Anna Karenina I came to know not only how Anna's lover is disturbed on knowing his lady-love has conceived from him but felt that men are generally prone to react like that and are not mentally prepared to take the reality and impending responsibility. Anna remains quite composed in the situation.

I equally enjoyed Sir Walter Scott's IVANHOE and The Bride of LAMMERMOOR. They make interesting reading with their fairy-tale like quality. The scene in this novel in which the heroine throws away from the window of the carriage a copy of the Bible given to her while her leaving the school has made a lasting impression on my rebellious mind. It is difficult to rival the scene in which a human being expresses revolt against tradition and snobbery with such fierceness.

Ernest Hemingway's A FAREWELL TO ARMS is a moving story with war background. Quite a gripping story. I like his 'THE OLD MAN & THE SEA', more for its optimism. Man succeeding over Nature, a titanic force to use Hardy's term. Thomas Hardy's prose abounds in poetic quality. And in his sheer descriptive power he rivals masters of English prose like Charles Dickens. Hardy's prose is poetic-prose. His descriptions are poetic cinematographic. For Ex. description of nature, description of heroine in RETURN OF THE NATIVE. How I wished there were more discussions on such qualities of writing of a writer at graduate level or at least post-graduate level of studies; but alas ! There were none. So what oft was thought found no scope for expression. This aspect of discussion was and is conspicuously absent in the process of our learning; even now there is not much worthy and not adequate dialogue among the learners on what they study.

We seem to turn a deaf ear to the view held by Socrates that life without discourse would be unworthy of man.

The great romantic quartet comprising Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Byron were of course the delight of most students in our times. All of them have the capacity to lift you, transport you from the mundane to the world of delight. Wordsworth's Lucy poems, TINTERN ABBEY, Keats' ODE TO NIGHTINGALE, ODE TO AUTUMN, Shelley's SKYLARK took me as if on a flight of fancy on a journey of ethereal happiness. I must add to this list Omar Khayyam. His RUBAIYYAT are simply intoxicating. The highly exhilarating quartets are also highly philosophical.

Human relationship has always been a subject of great interest for me and EM Forster's. A PASSAGE TO INDIA offers a fine study of Indo-European relations. The novel has other aspects also but this one delights me more. A novel tells a story as E.M. Forster the novelist himself says and A Passage to India tells a story of Indo-European relationship and tells it nicely. And Forster draws a pragmatic inference from the story and it is that relationships are possible at the individual level; at the community level they fail. It is this ability of a writer to provoke thought that impresses me so much and which I admire so much. EM Forster's essays are equally delightful. John Steinbeck's MOON IS DOWN set in war background

presents a rare situation. A town is devastated in war, has experienced death, and destruction, has become a victim of war crimes like arsening, looting, rape and so on. There are very few left alive in that town. As a soldier enters into a house, he is confronted by a woman who tells him that he could do whatever he wished of her and better have done with it for he has come for it that is to rape her. Upon hearing her ranting like that he shouts back rather angrily that does she know what his suffering is and to her surprise tells her that he has been away from home for nearly four years fighting on the front and knows nothing about his wife, his family and asks her could they not just talk for a while as human beings? This aspect and a quite a true and serious one of the soldiers' life accounts for the uniqueness of this novel.

D.H. Lawrence is a highly thought-provoking writer who shook the world with his *LADY CHATTERLAY'S LOVER*. He propounded the thought that flesh and blood are truer than thought, instinct is truer than reason. His short story **The Horse Dealer's Daughter** beautifully demonstrates it. I liked his **Sons and Lovers** with its element of Oedipus Complex. It is a wonderful portrayal of a young lad-Paul – who fails to mature in his relationship with Clara and Mirium. One satisfies his carnal passion (Clara), the other, his intellectual passion (Minimum). He leaves both because of his doting relationship with his mother. When the mother realises it, it is too late. Of course, she succumbs to her illness. To a great extent I find a reflection of Paul in my ownself.

I also realised and understood the feeling of possessiveness through two women in my life. My sis-in-law and my aunt. My sis-in-law was instrumental in settling my marriage and taking it to its logical end that is celebration; but thereafter trouble started brewing and after sometime I realised that she was finding it emotionally difficult to accept the fact that once married, the son, and she loved me like a mother, has to discharge his duties towards his wife and that he could not be at her beck and call as he could be formerly. Probably, it was a fear of me being severed from her. Earlier, a similar feeling was expressed by my aunt at the time of my leaving Bhopal to take up my job as a lecturer in Mahad, in Konkan region nearly six fifty miles away for which my sis-in-law had played a leading role. In fact, she had worked out the whole thing for me after taking me along with her to Bombay – now Mumbai – immediately after I had cleared M.A. I got the job and eventually left Bhopal all too

suddenly. While I was leaving she came to see me off at the gate of the compound of the quarters in which we lived and told me in no uncertain terms that she felt sad that I was going away so far and felt bad that I was snatched away from her by my sis-in-law. In both the cases the mothers in the two ladies were showing and speaking out their possessiveness. A wife's possessiveness is different. A wife has a right to her husband which is exercised righteously by most of the wives. Some exercise it openly, while some others do it mutely. When a woman praises and shows admiration for a man, his wife is all smiles but the smile is not innocent and pure; it has a slight shade of cruel pleasure indicating that he is her husband and he is hers only.

Two of Shaw's plays, namely, **Arms and the Man** and **Candida** are my favourites. Shaw was an intellectual and he provides food for thought. **Arms and the Man** speaks practical wisdom. When in a battle your arms and ammunition are exhausted, your food supplies are cut, then sticking to the post would be foolhardiness. The best thing would be to leave the post and regain your strength so that you can come back to launch a fresh attack.

CANDIDA throws another piece of pragmatic wisdom. There is nothing much wrong in loving even after marriage, only marriage should not go to rocks. The auction scene where Candida asks her young lover and her husband to show their stakes for her is a master-stroke of imagination and lifts Candida's character to a sublime height.

Bertrand Russel's essays are delight for intellectuals. Entering teaching profession made it easy for me to get access to many authors, many books.

In the eighties I turned towards Indo-English writers. The leading among them of course, being R.K. Narayan whose **GUIDE**, **THE ENGLISH TEACHER**, his autobiography – **MY DAYS** are the delight of any reader. Khushwant Singh however, is charmer. What a prolific writer ! This man who lived well past ninety wrote a huge number of books. **THE TRAIN TO PAKISTAN**, **THE COMPANY OF WOMEN**, **HISTORY OF THE SIKHS**, his autobiography **TRUTH, LOVE AND A LITTLE MALICE** and **THE END OF INDIA** are among his renowned books. Literature, History, Politics, Society; his pen moves effortlessly

and with equal ease in all fields and his writing simply charm you. He has a charming style and an exceptional command over the English language due to which he is able to captivate his readers and makes difficult contents easily understandable. And his writing smacks of honesty which counts among high merits on the part of a writer.

In recent times Chetan Bhagat has been making fast strides as a writer. Simplicity of language and modern day settings are the highlights of his writing. FIVE POINT SOMEONE, ONE NIGHT AT THE CALL CENTER, TWO STATES are among his novels I have liked. THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS brought Arundhati Roy great fame.

Among Hindi writers apart from Premchand, the man who has made a striking impact as a story writer is Saadat Hasan Manto. Sex is a region in which he seems to overtake D.H. Lawrence. THANDA GOSHT and a few stories of this type are enough to show the reader his prowess in this field. Of course one enjoys his other stories also immensely and he counts among my prized collections. He has written lots of stories, examining human behaviour and its various psychological shades. He along with Premchand make an awesome pair of story-writers.

Amruta Pritam's RASEEDEE TICKET makes an enjoyable reading. Mannu Bhandari is a fantastic story-teller. Equally engaging is her autobiography – EK KAHANI YEH BHI. Dharamveer and Pushpa Bharti's Letters offer you insight into the mind of these writers.

Sharad Joshi shows incisive insight into his satirical writings. His YATHAVKASH is very crispy.

Kamleshwar is another of the noted writers I was able to read. His KITNE PAKISTAN shows his literary height.

Recently I happened to read some more Marathi writers. Keshav Meshram whose all major works I have read presents a very realistic picture of the Dalits. Their sufferings are very poignantly brought out in his stories. His **Hakikat & Jatayu**, Rutleli MANSA are among my

favourites. His poetry is very difficult. Narayan Surve has written poetry only. He has nine volumes to his credit dealing with the lives of the lowly. I like his MAZE VIDYAPEETH so much ! His poetry has mass appeal. I read Vishwas Patil's PANIPAT and MAHANAYAK and both the books show him as a rare writer who has read hundreds of books before venturing to write on these subjects. No wonder both the novels make an engaging reading.

Shivaji Sawant's YUGANDHAR on the life of Krishna simply holds you. This nine hundred forty eight pages book on Lord Krishna's life reveals his character through Lord Krishna Himself, Rukhminee, Draupadi, Arjun, Daruk, Satyaki & Uddhav. It shows his deep brooding, the references, his open-eyed observation. Though a lengthy work, you just swim through the pages.

Achyut Godbole's MUSAFIR is an autobiographical account that is crispy to read and is an enriching experience from the point of view of gathering knowledge. The book has seen twenty-two editions so far that itself speaks volumes of its quality, its greatness.

Well ! I have mentioned the authors who have made an impact on my mind. There are quite a few left out.

Why do I write ? Why have I written all this ?

The answer to these questions is that when you want to say something you need listeners. You cannot find them that easily. Some are simply not interested. Some others have not interest in such literary excursions. Still others are just unable to share because they are not acquainted with the material. So you just cannot get hold of people for all this kind of talk which for them sounds like a meaningless babble. So talking being ruled out, the other alternative for my restless soul was to write. Recently, I have finished writing my memories in Hindi which presents my recollections about happenings and people whom I encountered in my life in three places, namely, Indore, Bhopal and Konkan (Mahad and Thane). My writing deals with my experiences, and presenting people who make an impact on my life through their thoughts, ideas, behaviour and the values they held in their lives and to whom I

am forever indebted. The book covers a period of early ten years of life in which I saw the freedom struggle, the partition and its pre and post impact on our lives. Then some personal experiences. I have presented things which had been hovering upon my mind for years as if struggling to come out and finally, I have released them. It has been a delightful experience writing down all these things.

Now writing has some advantages. It is an experience that provides revelation and realisation. One is forced to think before one writes and in the process one's understanding is enhanced. And then as one starts writing down his thoughts, feelings, ideas, it becomes a pleasurable exercise. And yes so it has been for me. I write 'Swant-Sukhay' – I write for pleasure. Oh yes dear, I write for my pleasure, my delight.

Bio:

Prof. V.G. Nand is a retired Principal and Professor of English having taught English language and literature at graduate and post-graduate levels. He has taught Communication skills and public speaking to college students as also to professionals doing C.A. course. He had conducted Public Speaking and Effective Communication Course for Fifteen Summers for the Rotaract [Main] Club of Dombivli in recognition of which he was awarded Late AppaDatar Trophy for Best Social Worker of the town in 2001. He is a poet and translator with two publications to his credit namely TRIVIDHA in 2007 – a collection of poems in three languages, Marathi, Hindi, English and DHOOP KA SAAYA in 2012 – a collection of poems in Hindi. He has done a dozen of translations, seven of which have been published. 'Relationships' by N.F. Jain (English into English); some poems of Late Prof. and poet KeshavMeshram's poems from Marathi into English appearing in Indian Literature Vol.

XXIII No. 1 and 2 in 1980; two of his poems appeared in, 'Poisoned Bread' and 'No Entry for the New Sun' published by Orient Longmans in 1992 and Disha Publications in 1992 respectively, both edited by Arjun Dangle; 'Toba Teksinh' – Saadat Hassan Munto's story

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from Hindi into Marathi for Tarun Bharat in 2005; SONBA a short novel by Ramakant Jadhav, from Marathi into English published by Aai Publications Dombivli, in 2000 and by Hope India Delhi, in 2006; 'SONJATAK' by Ratanlal Sanagra from Marathi into English published by Signet Publications in 2002 and Padma Binani's A To Z Mahabharat from Hindi into English published by Binani Foundations in 2012.