Poetry

-J.P. Das

People often ask about

the meaning of poetry –

even they who won’t touch

poetry with a bargepole.

But then no one bothers to ask

about the meaning of Time

or the definition of Love,

or about the purport of Life.

It’s for sure, as someone said,

that no one reads poetry –

neither fishmonger nor chief minister,

neither publisher nor professor.

It’s also well-known

that these people are totally

unconcerned about

the rainbow and the butterfly,

about the patter of rain

and the smell of earth.

It is equally well-known

that poetry does not bring revolution.

It does not give bread to the hungry.

It cannot stop police bullets.

Poetry does not even

give a lesson in morality.

If that had been the poet’s aim,

he would have taken to the streets

a gun, not a pen, in his hand.

He would have raised battle-cries

and instead of writing poems

he would have coined slogans

and formulated morals.

Even they who read books

usually keep away from poetry.

However, there still are

some moon-struck people

who do read poetry.

They read a poem and create it too

along with the poet,

and breathe life into it.

A poem is only for him

who, without understanding it

in a first reading,

bravely gives it a second try.

The meaning of a poem

is only that much

which, through doubts and incomprehension,

crosses the frontiers of the eyes

and enters the innermost recesses

of the reader’s mind.

The poem’s reason for being

is only that which one understands

through its ambiguity and obscurity

and nothing more.

A poem is somewhat like love

or like time, if you please,

it’s fulfilled in itself.

A poem demands nothing,

it does not aspire for anything.

It is its own trial and realization;

its own content and expanse;

its own relevance and justification.

The poet, himself self-created,

creates its meaning

and also its obscurity.

A poem happens

beyond figures of speech,

beyond simile and metaphor.

A poem is above grammar and spelling

and punctuation marks.

It is free from the tyranny

of professors, critics,

theorists and interpreters.

A poem exists in its own sovereign land,

itself its lord and master.

No one reads poetry,

not even she