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Remembering the Good Old Postcard

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The new generation, the mobile savvy, the SMS savvy, the Whatsapp savvy, the email savvy, the Facebook savvy, the Twitter savvy generation may have no knowledge of the good old postcard. New things so easily replace the old things. But those who are in their forties, fifties, sixties and so on may not forget this 4"x 6" yellowish card which once was the most common means of communication between humans who wanted to communicate on personal or impersonal subjects. Nobody writes a postcard these days. E mails, for those who can use this epistolary device known to the humans till date or net talking sites or mobile phones, do the job of the good old postcard. In the good olden days all that you had to do was to pull out a postcard from your personal stock of postcards for the month from your study shelf and, as they say, had to put pen to paper. And there it goes (or went). Information, emotions flowed so easily with pen in hand and a postcard on your study table. The 4"x 6" piece of space on one side and half of it on the other side was space enough to pour out your emotions on to it or if it was purely a business transaction this space was enough to accommodate whatever you had to communicate by way of pure information. Gone are those days. Today you pick up your mobile phone, ring the desired telephone number and there you are. You are instantly connected to your correspondent. And you can go on and on. There are enough schemes in the market to take care of how long you wish to talk. Your talk time is now in your hands. Instant connect. Instant response. And you can mobilephone to your friend, boyfriend and girlfriend *ad*

infinitum. The range and consequently the nomenclature have enlarged since the postcard was in fashion. Be that as it may, the good ole postcard has taken away with it the anxiety and anticipation of waiting and the thrill of receiving this little piece of yellowish card. This is the age of instant pleasures. Instant gratification. Instant satiation, perhaps. Not so with the good old postcard. The sight of the postman gladdened your heart. The postman was not just another person. He was a special person who brought tidings from afar and after many days. The postman has all but disappeared these days and the courier man brings only business letters.

Nobody felt ashamed at the lowly price of the postcard. Inland letters and envelopes were used not because they cost more than the postcard but because there was a justification for using them. One used the inland letter when one had lots of things to say or when one wanted to ensure confidentiality for the mailed material. The postal envelope was used only when one wanted to send a business letter or some item by mail. In all other circumstances the post card was the one thing. The low price did not attach any sense of low self-esteem to the postcard nor to the user of the postcard. In its early days the good old postcard cost only some paise. In today's world when the value of a thing is decided by its price tag, the lowly postcard could not survive and therefore, it is all the better that it has practically died a natural death although the postal department continues to print and sell it in its post offices. The invention and proliferation of the computer, thanks to the ubiquitous cybercafés and laptops, people have absolutely no patience for putting pen to paper. In fact we have now entered the age of the paperless office and the day is not far when we shall have paperless schools and paperless homes. Students doing their studies and writing their exams online is fast becoming a cyber-reality in our country. Technology affects human behaviour. A time may come when *Homo sapiens* or will it be *homo cyberians* will have no use for ink and writing equipment.

However, writing a letter was not simply an exercise in writing. It was much more than that. The writer of a postcard was very conscious of to whom he/she was sending the postcard and this thought decided not only the salutation part and the signature part of your letter but also what you wrote between the salutation and the signatures. Economy of expression without sacrificing exquisiteness of style was a prime concern of the letter writer. There was no room for superfluity for the writer of the postcard. The limited space provided by the postcard was an exercise in self-discipline. Discipline of thoughts and discipline of expression were the two disciplines that the little postcard inculcated in the letter writer. The postcard, in this way, inadvertently shaped the personality of the letter writers, at any rate of those who didn't grudge putting pen to paper or more precisely postcard. The ability to say precisely what you must say and say nothing irrelevant and to say this in a manner that suits your content is one of the most difficult skills. Many people are victims of incoherence and irrelevance both in speech and in writing provided they ever sit down to pen anything. The service rendered *gratis* by the postcard in tightening the loose ends of personality can never be overestimated.

The postcard costing just a few paise in its early days and later on just one rupee was a perfect symbol of a truly egalitarian society. Both the well-to-do and the not so well-to-do had equal access to this item of stationery not like today when the society is divided between those who are cyber savvy, owning expensive laptops and smart phones and the poor ones who use an ordinary mobile phone to communicate. So much for the democratic credentials of the good old postcard. The good old postcard was a leveller of class divisions. The poor could access this cheaply available writing item without grudging its price and the rich didn't feel ashamed in using this humblest of the writing materials.