

Braided Haiku: Shaping Meandering Thoughts

by *Pravat Kumar Padhy*

In March 2016, I explored a new form of poetry, hainka, which is a poetic fusion of haiku and tanka. It is characterized by the image-linking of the fragment of the haiku as the ‘pivot line’ (*kakekotoba*) of the following tanka. Jim Kacian liked the format and archived the essay with examples in the digital library of the Haiku Foundation. Some of the hainka are translated into the Japanese language by Prof. Hidenori Hiruta and into Arabic by Dr. Mohammad H. Raisha.

Taking a cue from hainka, I experimented with the branched or linked haiku form in July 2021. Initially, I tried to entwine or weave together a one-liner and a normative three-line haiku with the fragment as the word phrase (the italicized part) of the monoku:

origami *a paper boat* with memories

a paper boat
I loop from one fold
to another

Later, with minor modifications, I attempted to introduce it as braided haiku, a plaited form having a three-line haiku embedded within two short one-liners (monoku). The italic word(s) of the first one-liner acts as a fragment of the following three-line haiku. The second and concluding one-liner acts as a complement component with an overall subtle link and shift. I submitted a few haiku to Eric A. Lohman, the editor of *Fresh Out Journal*:

hiding behind *a half-clad moon*

a half-clad moon
the other hemisphere
sun-brightened

sliding clouds richness enlivened the serrated edge

origami *memories* she kept folded

memories
I unloop plait
by plait

the flow of long hair shapes the wind

Lohman suggested instead of using the italicized part of the monoku as a “repeated line,” it would be interesting to work on “finding more pieces that could be set in italics because they go together and form a separate ku by themselves, but become something else when joined with the non-italicized parts (which in turn might be able to stand on their own as well).”

There were many exchanges of emails with Lohman during May 2023. Indeed, Lohman appreciated my passion to sprout the plant of the new form that I seeded long back in 2021. I did some word-play and poetic twists as advised by Lohman to have a meaningful combination of the distinct parts of all four lines (*italicized* and non-italicized or plain text) and created a braided form of haiku:

hiding behind *a half-clad moon*

the other hemisphere
sun-brightened

sliding clouds *the serrated edge*

There are two monoku: one at the top and one at the bottom, and with a two-liner in between. In all, the braided haiku is finally framed out to be two three-line standalone haiku: one *italicized*, the other in plain text, and two monoku out of a four-line micropoem. The form is titled “braided haiku” as three plaits are required to braid or weave. Here we have two parts in each of three plaits (one part is *italicized* and the second part is in plain text) to compose two standalone three-line haiku.

Let us examine this braided haiku form as enumerated below:

hiding behind *a half-clad moon*

the other hemisphere
sun-brightened

floating clouds *the serrated edge*

a half-clad moon
sun-brightened
the serrated edge

hiding behind
the other hemisphere
floating clouds

Pravat Kumar Padhy, *Fresh Out: An Arts and Poetry Collective*, 28
May 2023 (Ed. Eric A. Lohman)

origami memories a twist-folded rose

I gently unloop
plait by plait her long hair

the flow *contours the wind*

origami memories
plait by plait her long hair
contours the wind

a twist-folded rose
I gently unloop
the flow

Pravat Kumar Padhy, *Fresh Out: An Arts and Poetry Collective*, 11 June 2023
(Ed. Eric A. Lohman)

smoke of the battlefield *the scattered silence*

a thin patch of grass
mingles with the winter fog

the rising sun *swaddling for hope*

smoke of the battlefield
mingles with the winter fog
the rising sun

the scattered silence
a thin patch of grass
swaddling for hope

Pravat Kumar Padhy, *Fireflies' Light*, Issue 28, October 2023 (Eds.
Mason Arledge and John J. Han)

The following steps can be followed to write a braided haiku:

1. Write one one-liner (top monoku), a short one-breath poem would be ideal.
2. Write a two-liner in a formal meaningful form.
3. Write another monoku (bottom monoku).
4. Keep in mind that these have some common meanings based on the link and shift technique, which results in a holistic poem of four lines.
5. Now italicize the words or word phrases of part of both monoku and the two-liner in such a way as to write two independent three-line haiku: one combines vertically with the italicized parts and the other combines with the plain text. So, in the end, there will be two standalone three-line haiku with line one, line two, and line three respectively by independently combining the italicized text and the plain text (from the monoku at top, two-liner and the monoku at the bottom).
6. The three-line haiku can be arranged one after the other to have a meaningful sequence.
7. Thus, with two monoku and one two-liner in between, we plait the italicized words and plain text to further generate two more three-line haiku. Hence, the genre is named “braided haiku.”
8. This can be written solo or in a collaborative way.
9. The form can be displayed as 1/2/1 with both *italicized* and plain text, and as 1/2/1/3/3 having two braided haiku.

Word choice and its placement are very critical to composing a braided haiku. In the end, it should form legitimate poetic imagery with a haiku spirit, and each needs to stand on its own merit.

Although braided haiku can be written solo or collaboratively, writing them solo is often preferred because the poet has the liberty to twist the words and place them accordingly. However, collaboration can be more fun.

The literary leads can be enumerated by merging the images from monoku along with the two-liner and composing three-line haiku. It appears a bit challenging, but it is fulfilling as it braids into a new form with distinct imageries. The interplay of creativity and language fabric gives birth to two haiku having distinct newness. It may be noted that the braided haiku as such with a four-line poem needs to reflect a broad thematic reference with the link and shift technique. Aspects of reference to both nature and human dimensions would make the genre more elegant and poetically rich. The format of braided haiku adds a different literary dimension to the haiku genre by braiding with linked images. Finally, it portrays a meaningful poetic storyline or cinematic scene.

There have been many innovative experiments on haiku and related genres. Garry Gay invented the linked version poem *rengay* in 1992. Peter Jastermsky introduced the concept *split sequence*, a collaborative (or even solo) haiku genre in 2017 by splitting lines of haiku and placing a haiku in between.

Inspired by Grant Hackett, Johannes S. H. Bjerg is credited with the creation of the *parallel haiku* form. The haiku are arranged side by side in two parallel columns in such a way that they can be read vertically as two poems and horizontally as one poem. "Parallels" is a form that Johannes describes as "two simultaneous instances, two trains of 'thought' in juxtaposition with each other while often with their own juxtaposition," which had grown out of an email exchange with Grant Hackett.

Dietmar Tauchner in his essay “Raindrops in a Wine Glass,” which is archived in the *Wales Haiku Journal*, says, “Basho actually drew attention to renewal as an important poetic principle in haikai, the principle of *atarashimi* — finding new subject matter, content (imagery) that poets have not ventured to use before, or approaching established themes in new ways (*honkadori*). Basho expressed this in a straightforward maxim: “don’t follow in the footsteps of the ancients, but seek their goals.”

I wish the attempt to germinate the braided haiku so that it may nurture into a colourful plant in the garden of haiku.

Pravat Kumar Padhy holds a Master of Science and a Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Technology, ISM Dhanbad. He is a mainstream poet and a writer of Japanese short forms of poetry. His poem “How Beautiful” is included in the undergraduate curriculum at the university level. Pravat’s haiku won The Kloštar Ivanić International Haiku Award, the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Invitational Award, the IAFOR Vladimir Devidé Haiku Award, the Setouchi Matsuyama Photo Haiku Award, and others. His haiku are featured at Mann Library, Cornell University, Red Moon Anthology and his tanka is figured in the Kudo Resource Guide at the University of California, Berkeley. His Taiga (Tanka-Photo) is displayed in the 20th Anniversary Taiga Showcase of the American Tanka Society and recently at the Haiku North America Conference. Pravat was nominated as the panel judge of The Haiku Foundation Touchstone Awards and he is presently serving as the haibun editor for the Under the Bashō journal.