

# A Poetics of Exile: An Academic Study of Haiku and Diaku in Udaya R. Tennakoon's Work

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## **Abstract**

This article offers a critical literary analysis of *\*Haiku and Diaku – A New Form of Exile Poetry\** by Udaya R. Tennakoon, with a particular focus on the author's innovative poetic form, "Diaku." By merging the traditional Japanese aesthetics of haiku with the existential themes of migration and displacement, Tennakoon constructs a hybrid form that reflects the psychological and philosophical nuances of the diasporic condition. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from diaspora studies, minimalist poetics, and intercultural literary theory, this study examines how Diaku functions both as poetic innovation and cultural testimony. Through close reading of representative poems, the paper explores key themes such as fragmented identity, memory, alienation, and the symbolic interplay between inner exile and outer landscapes. Ultimately, Tennakoon's work is positioned as a unique contribution to contemporary transnational poetics.

## Exemplary Poems Cited in This Study (Organized Thematically)

### I. Identity and Diaspora

#### *\*Name and surname\**

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Name and surname  
Do I belong to hidden?  
Truths of virtue?  
Being a Father. Having children... Sinn

#### *\*Just memories no albums\**

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My childhood  
just memories no albums  
My son  
his questions, my imageless replies

#### *\*Outside and Panopticon theory\**

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After five years  
Again, police check-up me  
Contemplated mind  
Outside and panopticon theory

#### *\*A leaf in my book\**

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Early autumn  
Trees begin to pause  
A leaf in my book

### II. Philosophical and Spiritual Reflection

#### *\*Nirvana\**

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Let it go  
And bring it back nothing  
Nirvana  
Not being touched, let it be

#### *\*The heaven of self\**

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Wish of dying breath  
To go beyond galaxy

The heaven of self  
No body and mind, figureless vision

*\*Clock on the wall\**

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Candle goes out  
Embracing my desires  
Clock on the wall

### III. Social Critique and Observation

*\*Animals in zoo\**

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Animals in zoo  
Cages — who are the guests?  
Civilization!

*\*Party dress\**

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Party dress  
Covered by the winter jacket  
Put on mask

### IV. Emotional and Psychological Experience

*\*The cup is empty\**

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The cup is empty  
Just when I am thirsty  
In bed with laptop  
Warmth of virtual organs awakens pain

*\*Folded umbrella\**

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In the rain  
I see your face, inside tears hidden  
Folded umbrella

*\*Silence speaks\**

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A great distance  
Between us, even at home  
Silence speaks

*\*A baby's born\**

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Life moments  
Breaks every now and then  
A baby's born

## V. Nature and Symbolism

*\*Leaves fall\**

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A lonely cat  
Under the old tree sleeps  
Leaves fall

*\*Dispersed bees\**

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Snow flaking night  
Through the street lamp light  
Dispersed bees

## 1. Introduction: Redefining Diaspora through Poetic Form

This paper explores the intersection of poetic form and diasporic experience through an analysis of Udaya R. Tennakoon's *\*Haiku and Diaku – A New Form of Exile Poetry\**. In an era of mass migration and global dislocation, the question arises: how can poetry express, embody, or resist the conditions of exile? The present study takes this question seriously by focusing on Tennakoon's creation of the "Diaku," a new poetic form that combines the minimalist structure of haiku with an added line that functions as both rupture and resolution.

Tennakoon's work is significant for its formal innovation and its thematic breadth. It brings together Eastern poetic traditions and Western philosophical reflections to articulate a voice shaped by transnational movement, cultural negotiation, and inner exile. This hybrid voice challenges fixed notions of identity, language, and homeland, offering instead a poetics rooted in fragmentation, displacement, and introspection.

The aim of this paper is threefold: first, to situate Tennakoon's Diaku within the tradition of Japanese short-form poetry and diasporic literature; second, to conduct close readings of selected poems to identify recurring themes and aesthetic strategies; and third, to assess how form and content interact to produce a uniquely diasporic mode of poetic expression.

The analysis is grounded in literary and cultural theory, drawing on diaspora studies, minimalist aesthetics, and global poetics. By foregrounding Tennakoon's work, this study contributes to a growing conversation around literary hybridity, the poetics of exile, and the evolving shape of transnational literature.

## 2. Literature Review: Contextualizing Diaku in Diasporic and Poetic Traditions

The study of diasporic literature often engages with themes of identity fragmentation, cultural hybridity, and linguistic negotiation. Foundational thinkers such as Stuart Hall (1990), Paul Gilroy (1993), and Avtar Brah (1996) have articulated diaspora not as a singular experience of displacement but as an ongoing process of negotiation between belonging and estrangement. Tennakoon's *\*Haiku and Diaku\** can be productively situated within this discourse, where the poetic form itself becomes a site of cultural translation and existential inquiry.

Within poetry studies, minimalist forms such as haiku and tanka have long fascinated scholars for their capacity to distill complex emotions and landscapes into brief, often imagistic expressions. William J. Higginson's *\*The Haiku Handbook\** (1985) and Stephen

Addiss's *\*The Art of Haiku\** (2012) trace the aesthetic principles of Japanese short-form poetry, emphasizing nature, seasonality, and introspective presence. Tennakoon draws from this lineage but redirects its focus toward the affective and philosophical contours of displacement.

More recently, hybrid forms have emerged in global poetics, responding to intercultural realities and transnational subjectivities. Fabrizio Frosini's work with Poets Unite Worldwide promotes the blending of haiku, senryu, and tanka with contemporary themes—laying conceptual groundwork for innovations like Diaku. Tennakoon advances this tradition by formalizing the Diaku structure (5-7-5-10 syllables) to represent a philosophical and emotional rupture that mirrors diasporic existence.

In the broader context of world literature, Diaku can be seen alongside poetic responses to exile by figures such as Mahmoud Darwish and Li-Young Lee. Like these poets, Tennakoon treats form not merely as a container but as an extension of the self—fragmented, mobile, and haunted by absence.

### **3. Discussion and Synthesis: Diaku as Poetic and Cultural Gesture**

Udaya R. Tennakoon's *\*Haiku and Diaku\** serves as a compelling case study in the evolution of poetic form under conditions of migration and intercultural tension. The Diaku, as a poetic structure, demonstrates how syllabic constraints can be expanded to convey psychological and political depth. Where haiku has historically been associated with stillness and nature, Diaku infuses the form with movement, rupture, and reflective aftershock.

Through close readings, it becomes evident that the final ten-syllable line in Diaku functions as a philosophical pivot. In poems such as *\*The cup is empty\**, the first three lines express physical lack, while the concluding line transitions the experience into the digital and affective realm—'Warmth of virtual organs awakens pain.' Similarly, in *\*Just memories no albums\**, the fourth line conveys the rupture of intergenerational transmission—a common theme in diasporic literature.

This structural innovation is not only literary but cultural. The Diaku format itself becomes a symbol of hybrid identity, combining Japanese formalism with Western autobiographical and philosophical impulses. It accommodates emotional depth without excess, balancing restraint with expressive insight. It also invites cross-linguistic interpretation, reflecting the poet's own multilingual and multicultural condition.

### **4. Conclusion: Toward a Poetics of Fragment and Belonging**

Udaya R. Tennakoon's *\*Haiku and Diaku – A New Form of Exile Poetry\** reconfigures the relationship between poetic form and cultural identity in a time of global displacement. Through the invention of the Diaku, Tennakoon not only innovates within a centuries-old tradition of Japanese syllabic verse, but also injects it with the emotional, philosophical, and political textures of diasporic experience. The fourth line of the Diaku—extended, reflective, and often ruptural—serves as both a narrative opening and an epistemic break, mirroring the disjunctions experienced by those living in exile.

This study demonstrates that the Diaku form is not simply a hybrid literary device but a gesture of cultural survivance. As diasporic literature continues to evolve, works like Tennakoon's remind us that innovation often arises not despite displacement, but because of it. His contribution invites further exploration into how traditional forms may be reimagined to express the complexity of modern belonging.

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## Author Biography

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Udaya R. Tennakoon is a Sri Lankan-born poet, journalist, and independent researcher based in Zurich, Switzerland. His work explores themes of exile, identity, and philosophical reflection through innovative poetic forms, most notably the Diaku—a hybrid structure he pioneered to articulate the complexity of the diasporic experience. Tennakoon has published multiple collections in English and Sinhala, and his poetry has been translated into German, French, and Turkish. His background in political science and literature informs

a body of work that bridges aesthetics and activism, personal narrative and cultural critique.