

Poet: Messenger of Peace

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I am happy to participate in this Symposium jointly organized by four important Institutions on a very important theme—“Poetry for World Peace, Harmony and Humanism.” I congratulate them for their thoughtfulness in choosing this subject. To be in the midst of Poets is sheer joy. In the World Congress of Poets as Vice President for six years, I used to meet and interact with Poets well versed in their own languages in different countries. We are particularly happy to have with us Dr. Krishna Srinivas, the outstanding poet, and other eminent persons including those from Japan, led by the outstanding scholar and thinker Dr. Yoichi Kawada. We had the privilege of receiving you, Dr. Yoichi Kawada, and Soka Gakkai Youth Delegation in Chennai on 8th August 1995 when ‘World Poet Laureate Award’ was presented to Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. I had the pleasure of meeting and exchanging views with them in Tokyo a few years ago. We have also eminent Poets in Tamil Nadu assembled here. Perunkaviko Sethuraman is an outstanding Poet who has toured the world and attended several poet meets. We are honouring Dr. Ikeda, the popular World Poet with ‘World People’s Poet.’

My book of poems ‘Poet and Peace,’ I am dedicating to Dr. Krishna Srinivas, the gentle giant among World Poets and to Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, the World Poet for Peace. Let me welcome you all, the Poets, with my Poem—PEACE.

Oh! Poets Messengers of Peace
Patrons of Peace
Oh! Knights of the East and the West
with armour of Peace

Welcome to Thee
To this land of Sages and Seers
this land of Prophets of Peace
Thirumoolar and Thiruvalluvar
—Buddha and Gandhi

Welcome to Thee!
 Welcome to Peace!
 And Farewell to Arms!

From the earliest Mesopotamian literature five thousand years ago to the modern times, we witness poets and writers, sages and seers and leaders of thought in the world waging a relentless struggle for Peace, Truth, Freedom and Justice.

The Poets know no barriers. They are beyond barriers. Their voice is a voice of universal appeal. It is said poetry precedes prose. Poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. There cannot be a regulation saying that a poet has to write only this and not that, and a poet has to write only this way and not that way. In other words, the poets or poetry cannot be made to order. A poet is a peculiar species, a bundle of experience and emotion, inner vibrations and intuition giving out his outburst in verses. The real poet has to come out with his experience and emotions. Plato said “a poet is a light winged holy creature and cannot compose until he is possessed.” The poet in man is a man ‘possessed’ and his life as a poet runs along with the life of the man in turns and twists. It is said ultimately the poet outlives the man. A poet as a man possessed pours out his inner thoughts, feelings and emotions clothed in poetry. Several have written to say that the poet in man gives him the necessary solace and satisfaction which the man as a man in any vocation could not give him. It looks as though there will be Poets and Poetry as long as mankind lasts.

Poetry like art, involves both expression and communication. It embraces everything that is noble and lasting. In the World to-day, the Poets write on different subjects. They sing the praises of the Lord, the beauty of nature and the grandeur of the flora and the fauna. Also they write about the human weakness and failures, the sufferings of the downtrodden, social ills in society etc. Although the poets may not be able to take the mantle of reformers they have however, a duty to perform in that they have to express what is present in society and what they feel or they observe. Mother Teresa has in a letter to Navin Chawla said about writings: “all you do, all you write, do it all for the glory of God and the good of all people.”

In India, Vedas, scriptures and epics are in verses. Alwars and Nayanmars have given their divine verses. Saint Thiruvalluvar, Kalidas, Tulasidas, Kamban and others have given their immortal works in verses. Poet Subraminia Bharathiar, Bharathidasan, Vallathol, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo and others have also given their best through

poetry. We have Dr. Krishna Srinivas who has been giving outstanding poetry at the height of Parnassus. Poet Ikeda from Japan has been spreading his message of love, peace and brotherhood in the world through moving poems. He and myself have exchanged letters. Dr. Krishna Srinivas, myself and Dr. Ikeda have common commitment for the cause of peace through poetry. Dr. Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Movement and the institutions including the Institute of Oriental Philosophy which he has founded have been rendering commendable services for global peace, human values and empowerment. We greet them with great appreciation.

India for ages has been a land of several religions, co-existing together, preaching harmony, tolerance and brotherhood. Sufism prevalent in medieval India, also gave the message of secularism. Secularism is an integral part of the Indian Ethos. "Sarva Dharma Sambhava" is the creed that sustains Indian secularism. Our saints and sages have all preached this. Thirumoolar, the great Siddhar in his Thirmandhiram says, "Mankind is one and God is one." Saint Thiruvalluvar says in Thirukkural, "All men are born equal but distinctions arise only on the basis of performance in the respective occupations they take on". Gautama Buddha's message of Dharma spread by Emperor Ashoka and the eclectic faith of Akbar the Great, combining the best in Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism emphasized universal brotherhood and co-existence. The concept of Secular State permeated their rule.

Kabir and Guru Nanak preached oneness, brotherhood and love. Ramalinga Swamigal spread the message of compassion, universal brotherhood and Jeevakarunya (great mercy). Saint Narayana Guru said, "all are one with differences none." Rabindranath Tagore said, "There should be unity in diversity. Unity is not uniformity and only those who are different should unite." He also described India's composite fabric as the confluence of cultures. All religions and all people with different faith have their right to stay and serve the society and the country as equal and free citizens. It is not a question of somebody belonging to one religion or faith to live or not to live. To-day's Mantra for the world should be "Live and let live." For this, men's minds have to be cleansed. "Mental slums are more dangerous than material slums." Intolerance, fundamentalism, terrorism and the like emanate from such mental slums. Education and other sustained efforts from Poets and writers are required to do this cleansing.

Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote: "True Religious life must express itself in love and aim at the Unity of mankind." The goal of the world Unity

according to him is to be achieved by ahimsa which is insisted on by Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam and others.

Humanity and Humanism go together. Humanity combines Human and Unity. Mankind has as its core Humanism. Humanism is the pathway to harmony. Harmony in individual leads to Harmony in society, in nation and in the world. The mind of the man, the individual is important. It is the mind that binds. It is the mind that liberates. If the mind is controlled and cleansed, harmony is assured and it would be conducive to Peace. Swami Vivekananda has said:

How to attain purity living this life? Shall we go to the forest caves? What good would it do? If the mind is not under control, it is no use living in a cave because the same mind will bring all disturbances there. We will find twenty devils in the cave because all the devils are in the mind. If the mind is under control, we can have the cave anywhere, wherever we are.

It is our own mental attitude which makes the world what it is for us. Our thoughts make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds. Learn to see things in the proper light.

The Poets have to do their bit to make Man's mind clean and clear, divorced from evil forces. They have also to expose injustice, inequality, oppression and violence wherever they are and in whatever form they exist. If these irritants in society and nations go, the atmosphere becomes conducive for harmony and peace. Social equality and Justice are cardinal principles which should guide Human action. Dharma is based on moral strength and social justice.

The World of great hardship and suffering where sorrows pile up and troubles and tribulations multiply, making the life of the downtrodden miserable has upset the poet in Rabindranath Tagore. In his poem 'Ebar Phirao Morey (Recall me now),' he appeals to the Poets to espouse their cause.

God has set His face against him,
no one would help him,
There's bravado in his mouth,
he is conscious of his inferiority.

O Poet! Arise—if you have the heart,
Then take it up with you, and make a gift of it today
Piled up sorrows, intense agony,

a world of hardships lie ahead,
Abjectly poor, void, utterly small, inclosed and dark.
Food we want, we seek life, light we need,
we hanker for free air
We aspire for strength, health we covet and joyous resplendent life-span,
A chest expanded with courage,
in the midst of this destitution,
O Poet!
For once, you import a portrait faith from heaven!

Let us remember Dr. Ikeda's Clarion call to the Poets.

Poets, arise!
Wait for no one,
but stand up resolute
and alone!

With our words
and with our actions,
let us till and turn
the sprawling expanse,
the desert aridity
of people's hearts.

The voice of the poet
who has chosen to stand alone
calls out to and resounds with
the voice of another
self-sufficient poet.
A single ripple
elicits ten thousand waves.

When our cries of justice
swell to a symphony
extolling humanity and life
and when its resonant tones
reach all corners of the Earth,
wrapping and cradling it...

Then the deep red glory,
the dawning sun

of peace for all people everywhere,
will rise and lift
into the sky.

(from "*Salute to Poets*")

I wrote in an article to Bhavan's Journal, Bombay, in the year 1991: "Now is the time to consolidate Peace and the Peace Movement all over the world. Now is the need to ring the bell of Peace to reverberate and reach all corners of the world. It is a working Peace, a living Peace, not the Peace of the sepulchre, not the Peace of the void. It is the Peace, the fruition of Mankind's culture and civilization that makes men and women all over the world Human and Humane. It is a dynamic stance that helps Mankind to grow and progress."

Let us all work to reach these goals, with renewed vigour and dedication.