

# SACH

**South Asian Composite Heritage**

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## **‘Together For Peace’: Experiences From South Asia**



# EDITORIAL

## ‘Together For Peace’:

## Experiences From South Asia

IN the year 1982, the international community including nations, political groups, military groups and people, came forward to observe the International Day of Peace, to take collective initiatives for fostering peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and ceasefire. However, the world today is shook by the horrors of unending conflicts and unleashing devastations. Contrasting to the notions of international peace, cooperation and justice, communities are engulfed in wars, leading to loss of lives, driving tens of millions of people from their homes, and exposing them to poverty, hunger and torments of war. Perhaps, the pursuit of a peaceful society demands something more than cessation of violence and disarmament. In such a case, ideas of justice and addressing negative attitudes must be at the center of resolving conflicts. Although indicators and analytical standards of peace and holistic development are universal, human motivations and methods of achieving them may differ from one community to the other.

In a similar vein of thought, South Asian society is a blend of diverse cultural patterns and traditional influences. Since time immemorial, South Asia has been an abode to people belonging to different community groups. As the interaction between these groups increased, it led to an exchange of ideas and beliefs. Consequently, an accommodation of positive social elements helped to bridge the gap and eliminated the feeling of “otherness”. The resultant Composite Heritage resonated values of peace and harmony all across the region. In order to restore peace and harmony in South Asia today, we do not need to look further afield. One such instance can be found in the lingering aura of Delhi’s floral tradition, locally known as the ‘Phool Walon ki Sair’ (Envoy of Roses). A tradition started by Queen Mumtaz Mahal II in the 19th century, in perpetuation of a vow, is still continued in the streets of the Indian Capital. The offering of flower chadars and pankhas at the shrine of Hazrat Qutubuddin Bakhtiyaar Kaki and the Yog Maya Mandir in Mehrauli is not only a festival of flowers and feast. In addition, this procession is a blend of Persian fashion and local religious beliefs which carries a message of oneness and communal harmony. Similarly, values of Sufism and Sikhism emanate from a shared path and interpret religion in terms of human service and tolerance. This shared legacy and beliefs have also contributed to quell the differences that exist in both communities. Tagore’s Shantiniketan can be considered as a material manifestation of ideas like communal harmony and shared cultural space. It embodied principles of humanism, internationalism and sustainable environment, a unique blend of art, human values and cultural interchange. While Gurudev’s ideas were a unique blend of art, human values and cultural debate, in Mahatma’s idea of peace, ethical and spiritual esthesis took great prominence. These ideas were absorbed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, later manifested in Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy, guided by “friendship to all, malice towards none”. Gandhian philosophy excludes both physical violence and casting the opponent in the role of enemy, and hence presupposes compassion and self-criticism.

Today, the contemporary concerns revolve around rising communal madness, political polarization and quest for resources that has deepened divides and aggravated clashes between groups. In these dark times, we find a gleam of possibilities. In Afghanistan, the most striking grass-roots movement for peace in recent years started with just eight people. As laborers, farmers, retired army officers, a polio victim on crutches, a mechanic who was robbed of his sight by war and people from all walks of life kept marching for peace through Afghan villages laced with Roadside bombs and bottomless heartache, their numbers kept growing. As incidents of violence and abuse rose up in Manipur, Manipur ponies called for a peace rally spreading messages of harmony through the streets of Imphal West.

Since its inception, ISD has aimed to create possibilities for peace, preserving democratic values, as well as exploring and reviving various forms of Composite Heritage in South Asia. As a clarion call for peace, on September 21, ISD organized a Peace March in its fields of Jaunpur, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand. It conveyed a message for oneness, tranquility and social harmony. Some glimpses of the March has been featured in the issue. Even as horrific incidents of violence continue to plague us, there have been those who dared to stand up against the evils of society. Hence, this issue celebrates the chronicles of individuals, artists, activists and leaders who are invested to make an inclusive and just society. The essays included introduces us to some unsung stories of actors and their initiatives that aim to restore, as well as characterizes the need for peace and harmony.

# Poetry For Peace: 'Delay The War, It Is Better'

By SAHIR LUDHIANVI

An English translation of the poet's verses written for India and Pakistan at the time of the Tashkent peace agreement of 1966, which resolved the 1965 war.

Delay the war, it is better  
Your yard or mine,  
If the lights stay on, it is better  
The blood be your own or foreign  
It is the blood of Adam, after all  
The war, it may be in the west or east  
It is the murder of world peace, after all.  
The war itself is a bitter blight  
How then will it alleviate any affliction?  
The blood and fire will today be merciful  
But tomorrow will be starved, insufficient.  
Is it necessary, that streaming blood  
Be evidence of your superiority?  
To dispel the darkness of your own home  
Is it necessary to incinerate someone else's city?  
Bombs might shower on houses or borders  
They destroy the soul of an edifice;  
The land that burns, be yours or foreign  
All lives will be written in indigence.  
The tanks might charge, they might retreat  
The womb of the earth is left infertile  
Exult in victory or grieve in defeat  
Life will lament a loss that was futile  
For that I implore, my blameless mortals  
Delay the war, it is better  
Your yard or mine,  
If the lights stay on, it is better

Translated from Urdu by Vatsala Peshawaria.  
(Originally Published in Scroll.in)

# ‘Why Are You Fighting This War?’

By SATYAJIT RAY

Satyajit Ray’s famous anti-war song from ‘Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne’

Good grief, Look hard  
The men are all heading to war  
Good lord, Look hard  
The soldiers are all going to war  
So many, So many  
In hundreds, In thousands  
Armed, Slashing, Slaying  
Truth be told  
We all toil hard  
In hopes of gain  
But these soldiers, they frighten us  
On empty stomachs, they have to fight  
What if they die  
Each one  
Who is going to war  
Soldiers of the king of Halla  
Slaves of your master  
For whom are you fighting this war  
Why are you fighting this war  
The weapons you bear are a lie  
Because  
Eventually you will all die  
Wars between neighbors  
Wars between Nations  
Only lead to death and destruction  
Why then are you fighting this war  
Your lord and your master  
Your king and your minister  
Fret and fume  
Clamor and complain  
You the soldier  
Who are in the end  
Rendered Powerless Defenseless  
For whom then are you fighting this war  
Why then are you fighting this war

Translated by Somrita Urni Ganguly.  
(Originally published in Scroll.in)



# The Final Speech From 'The Great Dictator'

.....

I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business. I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I would like to help everyone - if possible - Jew, Gentile - black man - white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness - not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost...

The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in men - cries out for universal brotherhood - for the unity of us all. Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world - millions of despairing men, women, and little children - victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people.

To those who can hear me, I say - do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed - the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish...

Soldiers! don't give yourselves to brutes - men who despise you - enslave you - who regiment your lives - tell you what to do - what to think and what to feel! Who drill you - diet you - treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder. Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men - machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have the love of humanity in your hearts! You don't hate! Only the unloved hate - the unloved and the unnatural! Soldiers! Don't fight for slavery! Fight for liberty!

In the 17th Chapter of St Luke it is written: "the Kingdom of God is within man" - not one man nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people, have the power - the power to create machines. The power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure.

Then - in the name of democracy - let us use that power - let us all unite. Let us fight for a new world - a decent world that will give men a chance to work - that will give youth a future and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power. But they lie! They do not fulfill that promise. They never will!

Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people! Now let us fight to fulfill that promise! Let us fight to free the world - to do away with national barriers - to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness. Soldiers! In the name of democracy, let us all unite!

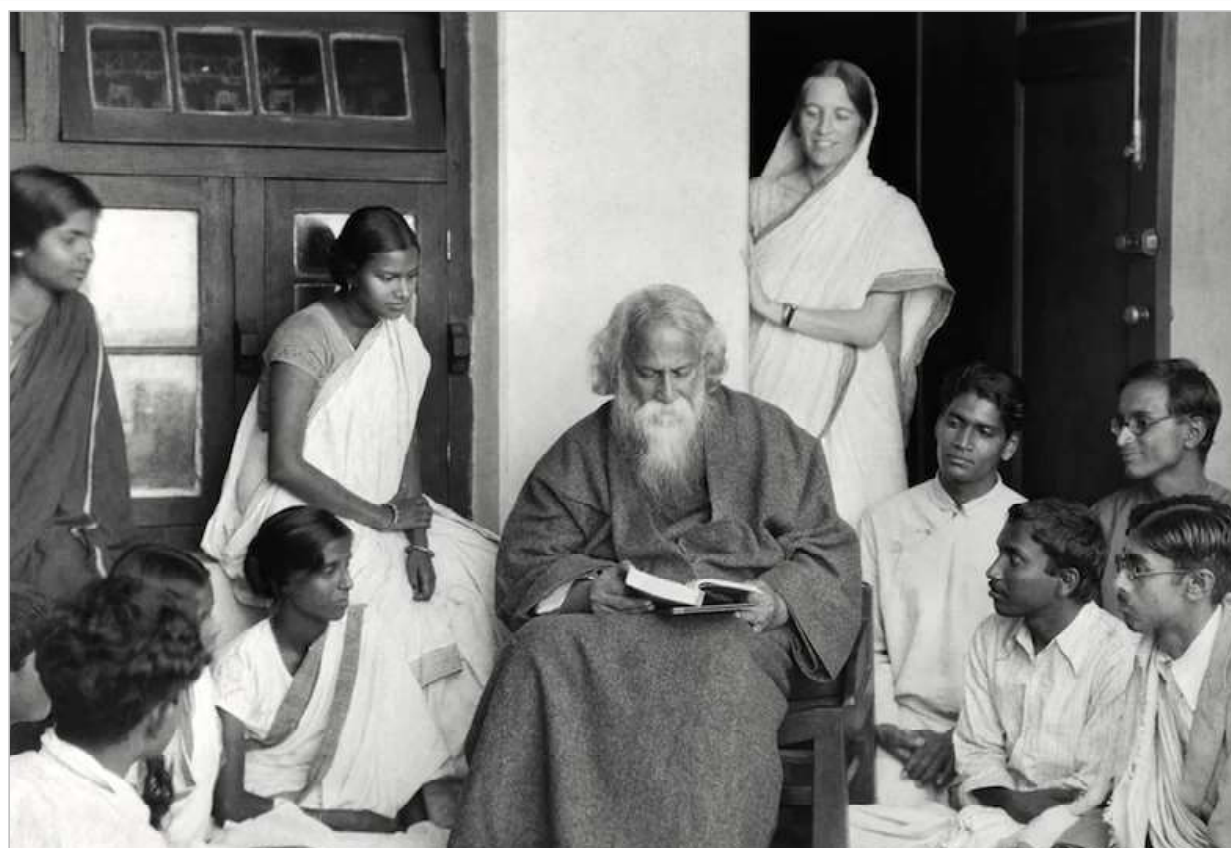
*Transcript of the Final speech from 'The Great Dictator'.*

# Exploring Tagore's Santiniketan, An Abode Of Learning Unlike Any In The World

By SANCHARI PAL

**LOCATED** about 158 km northwest of Kolkata in Bengal's rural hinterland, Santiniketan embodies Rabindranath Tagore's vision of a place of learning that is unfettered by religious and regional barriers. Established in 1863 with the aim of helping education go beyond the confines of the classroom, Santiniketan grew into the Visva Bharati

University in 1921, attracting some of the most creative minds in the country. From its very inception, Santiniketan was lovingly modeled by Tagore on the principles of humanism, internationalism and a sustainable environment. He developed a curriculum that was a unique blend of art, human values and cultural interchange. Even today, in every step,



in every brick and in every tree at Santiniketan, one can still feel his presence, his passion, his dedication and his pride in the institution.

This is the fascinating story of how the rural paradise of Santiniketan, Tagore's erstwhile home, became a thriving center of art, education and internationalism over the years. In 1862, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath, was taking a boat ride through Birbhum, the westernmost corner of Bengal, when he came across a landscape that struck him as the perfect place for meditation. Captivated by the kaleidoscopic beauty of the luxuriantly canopied *chhatim* trees and palm groves that offered shade in the rugged, red coloured terrain, he bought the large tract of land that had charmed him, built a small house and planted some saplings around it.

At that time, the area was called Bhubandanga after a local dacoit named Bhuban Dakat, but Debendranath Tagore decided to call the place Santiniketan, or the 'abode of peace', because of the serenity it brought to his soul. In 1863, he turned it into a spiritual centre where people from all religions, castes and creeds came and participated in meditation.

In the years that followed, Debendranath's son Rabindranath went on to become one of the most formidable literary forces India has ever produced. As one of the earliest educators to think in terms of the global village, he envisioned an education that was deeply rooted in one's immediate surroundings but connected to the cultures of the wider world.

With this in mind, on December 22, 1901, Rabindranath Tagore established an experimental school at Santiniketan with five students (including his eldest son) and an equal number of teachers. He originally named it Brahmacharya Ashram, in the tradition of ancient forest hermitages called *tapoban*.

The guiding principle of this little school is best described in Tagore's own words, "The highest education is that which does not

merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."

Located in the heart of nature, the school aimed to combine education with a sense of obligation towards the larger civic community. Blending the best of western and traditional eastern systems of education, the curriculum revolved organically around nature with classes being held in the open air. Tagore wanted his students to feel free despite being in the formal learning environment of a school, because he himself had dropped out of school when he found himself unable to think and felt claustrophobic within the four walls of a classroom.

At Patha Bhavan, as the school later came to be known, children sat on hand-woven mats beneath trees that they were allowed to climb and run beneath during breaks. Nature walks and excursions were a part of the curriculum, special attention was paid to natural phenomena and students were encouraged to follow the life cycles of insects, birds and plants. Other than such everyday subjects, emphasis was also given to vocational education. Flexible class schedules allowed for shifts in the weather and the seasonal festivals Tagore created for the children.

In an attempt to help with rural reconstruction, Tagore also sought to expand the school's relationship with the neighboring villages of the Santhal tribal community. Thanks to his efforts, Santiniketan has today become the largest center for educated Santhals in West-Bengal. Many of them have become teachers, several serving in Visva Bharati itself, while others have become social workers.

Santiniketan can be credited with taking the first path breaking steps in the field of education at a time when the country was slowly getting hitched to the European mode of education (textual and exam oriented knowledge imparted in closed classrooms).

Other than a humane and environment friendly educational system that aimed at

overall development of the personality, Santiniketan also offered one of the earliest co-educational programmes in South Asia.

In the year 1913, Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for his book of poems *Gitanjali*. The award enhanced the prestige of Santiniketan and in 1921, Tagore converted the little school into a university called the Visva Bharati. The motto that Tagore chose for the Visva Bharati University, *Yatra visvam bhavatyekanidam* (where the whole world can find a nest), reflected his aspirations for the institution.

The University offers courses in humanities, social science, science, fine arts, music, performing arts, education, agricultural science, and rural reconstruction. Its art college, Kala Bhavan, is widely considered to be one of the best art colleges in the world.

Tagore was one of the first to support and bring together different forms of arts at Santiniketan. He invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and all over the world to live together at Santiniketan on a daily basis and share their cultures with the students of Visva Bharati. He once wrote: "Without music and the fine arts, a nation lacks its highest means of national self-expression and the people remain inarticulate."

Tagore encouraged artists such as Nandalal Bose to take up residence at Santiniketan and devote themselves full-time to promoting a national form of art. He helped revive folk dances and introduced dance forms from other parts of India, such as Manipuri, Kathak and Kathakali, at Santiniketan. He also supported modern dance and was one of the first to recognise the talents of Uday Shankar, who was invited to perform at Santiniketan.

At Tagore's behest, annual festivals such as Basant Utsav and Poush Utsav became important cultural events, with students and teachers of Santiniketan playing an active role.

The grand Poush Utsav is celebrated on

the Foundation Day of the University, while the colorful Basant Utsav is celebrated on the occasion of Holi. The Nandan Mela, which was originally started to raise money for a poor student who needed money for treatment, is today an event where university students display and sell their art. Other events like the Sarodotsav (Autumn Festival), Maghotsav (Founding Day of the Sriniketan campus) and Brikhsharopan Utsav (Tree Planting Festival) are also celebrated with great pomp and fervor.

On all these occasions, the entire campus has a festive atmosphere, with *baul* (traditional wandering minstrels of Bengal) songs, tribal dances, and other cultural performances being organized throughout the township.

Encouraged by Tagore, rural artisans would bring their wares, like batik printed materials, the famous Santiniketan leather bags, earthenware, wooden *iktaras*, terracotta jewelry and paintings to these festivals, while urban counterparts would set up stalls where rural folk could buy industrially-produced goods from the cities.

Thanks to Tagore's legacy, Santiniketan has managed to preserve Bengal's fast-disappearing rural crafts culture through folk markets, like the weekly Bondangaar Haat, and rural cooperatives, like Amar Kutir. Another unique feature of Santiniketan is its lush greenery and aesthetically laid out campus, which stands testimony to Tagore's belief that the close connection between man and nature should be the founding principle of education.

The mud buildings, the frescoes and tree-lined avenues have a distinct architectural style, the hallmark of which is a dynamic simplicity.

The Uttarayan Complex in Santiniketan holds five homes that Tagore lived in at various stages of his life. Konark, the first home to be built, was used as a venue for poetry recitations and play rehearsals, while Shyamali (an eco friendly mud house) was an experiment by Tagore to see if a permanent mud roof could



be built. The outer walls of the houses in the Uttarayan Complex are decorated with mud murals painted by students of Kala Bhavana in 1935 under the supervision of the famous painter Nandalal Bose.

The Uttarayan complex has also hosted many famous people, including Mahatma Gandhi, who stayed here in 1940.

The complex also houses Rabindra Bhavan Museum or the Bichitra. Designed by Tagore's son, Rathindranath, the museum displays several original manuscripts, photographs, gifts Tagore received on his travels, letters (including Tagore's hand written letter refusing to accept knighthood), and his Nobel Prize medallion and citation. In 2004, his original Nobel medal was stolen from the premises and has since been replaced with a replica.

Some other notable places of historical and cultural interest are Santiniketan Griha – the building where most poems of Gitanjali were composed, the Upasana Griha – a deityless Belgium glass temple, the Amra Kunja (mango grove) where spring festivals are held, Dinantika – the tea club where teachers and staff would gather for a chat, and Teen Pahar – where baby Rabindranath once made three hillocks of pebbles. Shal Bithi, a mud path lined with a row of Shal trees, was the favorite walking route of Tagore at Santiniketan.

While Chaitya is a small mud and coal-tar house (resembling a typical thatched Bengali hut) that showcases art work by university students, Taladhawaj is a round mud hut, built around the trunk of a toddy palm, with palm leaves stretching out over its thatched roof.

Also, 2 km away from Santiniketan is Sriniketan, the part of Visva Bharati that is devoted to rural reconstruction.

Here, there are cottage industries that specialize in pottery, leatherwork, batik print and woodwork.

Other than its vibrant festivals and eclectic architecture, what makes Santiniketan really special is the fact that Visva Bharati University gives complete artistic freedom to

its students. In line with Tagore's immortal words, "Where the head is held high, and knowledge is free," the college knows that freedom to acquire knowledge also means the freedom to work whenever a student feels like. This is why, at Santiniketan, the studios are open 24x7 for students who want to work.

This ground-breaking outlook is also the reason why Santiniketan has given India many luminaries like pioneering painter Nandalal Bose, famous sculptor Ramkinkar Baij, Nobel-winning economist Amartya Sen, globally renowned filmmaker Satyajit Ray, and the country's leading art historian R. Siva Kumar. The University also has several eminent international alumni that include Indonesian painter Affandi, Italian Asianist Giuseppe Tucci, Chinese historian Tan Chung, eminent Indologist Moriz Winternitz, and Sri Lankan artist Harold Peiris, among many others. Pouring his creative genius into his work, Tagore himself produced some of his best literary works, paintings and sketches at Santiniketan.

Over the years, Santiniketan has adapted to the changing times. But the essence of the place is still what Tagore wanted it to be.

The Nobel Laureate's life, philosophy and literary works find their greatest reflection in Santiniketan, where classes are still taught in the open, where nature and its seasons are still celebrated instead of religious festivals, where the graduation ceremony is marked by the gifting of a *chhatim* leaf, and where education is rooted in Tagore's philosophy that "the whole world can find a nest."

Falling way outside the strict definition of an academic university, Santiniketan, an educational institution with a difference, is arguably Tagore's greatest work and a legacy India has to live up to. As Tagore wrote in his last letter to Mahatma Gandhi,

"Visva Bharati is like a vessel carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure and I hope it may claim special care from my countrymen for its preservation."

(Originally Published in *The Better India* )

# To Be Sasian

By HAMEED HAROON

**WE**, in South Asia, are proud inheritors of a legacy of shared experience based on over nine thousand years of minutely analyzed archaeological determinism in our material cultures. Our cultures are marked with the vital symbols and motifs of a dynamic continuity, etched deep into the ethos of this long shared experience since prehistory. There were moments in the historical process when many of us existed under one unified and approximate centralized government – during the periods of Ashoka, Alauddin Khilji, the early Mughals and even under British imperial rule. But such centralized governance was self-sustaining and successful only when the diversity of ecosystems, of ethnology and of regional trade was best understood, and when this was imaginatively transformed into coherent state policies.

I would be the last person to deny the existence of significant variations across South Asia – whether such variations occur in the fragile ecology of the Himalayan mountain systems in Nepal, Bhutan and Kashmir; in the lush green quasi-tropical expanse of forests in the Himalayan foothills, the Nepalese Terai, central Sri Lanka and the Deccan; in the lunar landscape of the plateaux stretching across Balochistan; in the expanse of arid dunes gleaming desert silver in the Great Thar; in the flat alluvial delta lands layered with tropical jungle in the Sundarbans; or in the paradise sun-soaked island archipelagos of the Maldives and the Laccadives. South Asia is a treasure of

geographical diversities and that diverse cultural mosaic is the essence of our shared cultural identity – may one dare to say, of one sacred geography – or at least a series of smaller interlocking ritual geographies.

Political boundaries need not be an obstacle to allowing the flourishing of a shared historical and cultural identity. The experience of Europe in the past few decades has almost certainly proved that. But unfortunately these very political boundaries have appeared as insurmountable obstacles within the span of our lifetime in South Asia. Under such circumstances, I find the Sasian journey – one spurred by a deep desire to culturally assimilate ourselves into an interactive single entity – will emerge as a journey of long pain and frequent disappointments.

Fortunately, it is also one marked by an almost inhuman persistence in the South Asian peoples and a desire to move forward and to attempt what is presently impossible – a desire to reactivate the diverse regional, ethnic and natural marketing matrixes across the South Asian heartland, and somehow miraculously to transform it into a circumstance that would allow us to function one day in the future as a culturally integrated whole. Economic necessity dictates this. Unless we are able to excavate and revitalize the threads of our underlying dormant legacy of cultural and economic interaction, unless we are able to fully grasp our mutual interdependence, South Asia cannot and will not rise to fulfill the potential of our



combined historical destinies.

It is not as if I inherently believe that South Asian governments would stand up and move forward of their own accord to fulfill a composite South Asian destiny. I do, however, possess a deep-seated conviction that the will of history will allow us space for an escalating interaction and the opportunity to breathe freely again. This clearly didn't happen in the bilateral India-Pakistan talks held over a decade ago in Agra.

On my return from Agra, I actually cried. It was so demeaning to have to return, having achieved nothing. Achieving healthy bilateral relations at Agra was a historical debt that we owed to South Asia's ghost cities – those wonderful cultural mosaics overflowing with pockets of poverty for over the last one hundred years – Delhi, Lahore, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Kathmandu, Kolkata and Dhaka. All these are ghost cities today, a string of urban monuments to the inhumanity and the cultural atrocities of 1947. What had stood before in their place a hundred years ago were cities that were once thriving multicultural entities with a developed legacy of traditions encasing interdependence, tolerance and creativity.

The combined forces of history and the petulance of politicians and religious extremists dressed in the vestments of an acute post-imperialist nationalism facilitated our separation. Administrative arrangements to rationalize governance and the development of communities is one thing; erecting permanent Berlin walls across the heart of South Asia is yet another.

The creation of my country, Pakistan, itself poses cultural dilemmas which have not been resolved, either at home or even in India today with respect to the relevance of the contours of South Asia's sacred geography. Understanding the past is the key to unlocking our current dilemmas with respect to who we are, where we come from and where we are

going. Even developed historiography and historians of pre-history in India have been unable to effectively answer questions such as those relating to the indigenous peoples of South Asia.

Sometimes pre-1947 historiography places a freeze on our ability to think. The late discovery of the Indus Valley civilization by Sir John Marshall and a team of archaeologists just prior to partition has prevented an analysis of the Indus Valley culture as being a composite multi-river system that included the Indus, the Hakra running parallel to it, and the almost mythical Saraswati which branched off presumably from the Jamuna and every once in a while reappears today, sometimes as the Ghaggar and the Looni in Rajasthan, culminating in the then fertile forested delta land of what is now the Rann of Kutch. How this multi-river civilization related to cultural developments in the Gangetic region and in Central India, still remains a mystery.

We lose our consciousness of the spread in interaction of cultures and civilizations in prehistory and join the Indians in celebrating the most visible symbols of this civilization – the Dancing Girl and the Priest King of Mohenjo Daro. How many people in India today are aware that the western piedmont of the Indus, the land leading to the plateau and mountain ranges of Central Balochistan is one of the crucial elements interacting in the genesis of the Indus Valley civilization?

Successive archaeological layers of cultural materials had been unearthed from the earlier Kot Diji culture (3000-2500 BC), the earlier Amri culture (3500-2700 BC), going backward through the findings of earlier layers such as those characterized by Faiz Mohammad as gray ware in the Quetta region and the dating of the Mehargarh piedmont culture from about 7500 BC through successive and continuous cultures down to the Indus Valley civilization.

The culturally conscious Indian has largely punched a stopwatch on the genesis of civilization in the Harappan period, and has a visible gap for the earlier five thousand years that reflect the interaction of the Zagros, the Eastern Iranian plateau and Central Asia with the vast region west of the Trans-Indus located in Pakistan today. Given that the migration of the Indo-Aryans almost certainly came through this region, is it surprising therefore that we make little real sense with respect to the Aryan migration into South Asia and its linkages and interaction with the indigenous populations of the multi-river Indus Valley culture? How on earth do we expect to explain how the region of the Trans-Indus interacted with the Gangetic plain, or even with the matrix of South Indian cultures at this period in prehistory? As a consequence we weave myths, sometimes directly linked to our preconceived religious beliefs. Even large strands of the Indus-Vedic religion have been submerged in the interests of understanding their later Gangetic counterparts. What we end up with is not an understanding of prehistory, but an unhistoric reaffirmation of our religion, injudiciously filtered through lenses such as the epics and a culture of sustained warfare.

In Pakistan the situation is no different. In the dictator Zia-ul-Haq's time, all doctoral theses relating to prehistory and history before the Arab invasion of Sindh by the young Umayyad General Mohammad bin Qasim (712 AD), were denied access to research and supervision. The site of a large lingam temple at Bhambhore unfortunately coincided with the upper layer of the Grand Mosque of Bhambhore, built presumably under the Arab domination of Sindh and Multan. As a consequence, the archaeologist F.A. Khan quietly reburied the lingams on the same site in the 1960s, leaving the evidence for archaeological rationalism to rediscover at a future date.

Such are the obstacles in both India

and Pakistan that efface our joint legacies and constitute formidable obstacles to reconstituting the interactive matrixes of our common heritage. I hardly need to point out that much the same exercise is being carried out in other parts of South Asia. It would be a tragedy to lose that common heritage – but to retain it is one of the essential components of our present Sasian journey. The printing of history textbooks by the Punjab Textbook Board in Pakistan today that state that Pakistan was formed in 712 AD and that the Mughal Empire was part of its greatest achievements, indicates the kind of pedestrian historicism with which we seek to poison South Asia's youth.

The essence of the Sasian journey is thus to reconstitute our collective memory of our interdependent legacy and to subject it to a powerful series of adaptive reuses that can form the basis for our move forward in an era when South Asia comprises over half a dozen new administrative units created in the 20th century. But this would be viable only when these autonomous units engage in a resumption of the kind of relationships – ethnic, historical and economic – that characterized a ten millennia history of coexistence. A failure to transcend current political boundaries and create a common market of ideas and economic interaction will lead to the kind of sporadic failures that characterize South Asian bilateral relations.

To enlarge the resultant osmosis to include all the states in South Asia – whether it be Myanmar or Afghanistan – would be a move towards restoring all the component parts of a multicultural mosaic that would in no small way help revitalize the oneness of South Asia. The Sasian journey thus becomes an act of restoration, of conservation and a new unbridled creativity in pursuit of South Asia. Let us move forward on that path.

*(Originally Published in Seminar)*

# ISD Peace March 2023

Since its inception in 2004, Institute for Social Democracy (ISD), through its regional programmes and grassroot level social intervention has stood firm to its objective of creating possibilities of peace, preserving democratic values, as well as exploring and reviving various forms of Composite Heritage. While working with diverse communities, ISD's initiatives outstrip the pedagogical nature of campaigns. Rather, it attempts to interact with communities and cultures for the purpose of establishing durable, peaceful and harmonious relationships. With its instrument of Composite Heritage, ISD has continuously tried to enhance dialogue between tension-driven social groups.

For ISD, its contributions revolving around peace and harmony, resonates with values of respect for different identities, guarantee of equal political-social rights and equality for participation. Such an idea goes beyond individual welfare and development, rather it calls for larger coordination and celebrates a collective legacy of the society. Bearing in mind its ideals, objectives and conflict-prone tendencies that have grappled the globe, ISD has added a new initiative to its list of activities that gives a clarion call for peace. This year, September 21, people mustered together in the respective fields of Jharkhand, Jaunpur and Uttarakhand for being a part of ISD's Peace March. Various interactive sessions, gatherings and cultural programmes were also organized, that carried messages of oneness, tranquility and social harmony. Some glimpses of the event are featured below:

















# Manipur's Ponies Carry Peace Message In Imphal West

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**AS** dark clouds hung heavy and violence continued in Manipur for more than a month, world famous Manipuri ponies carried the message of unity, peace and harmony throughout Imphal West district of strife-torn Manipur.

Deeply rooted in Manipuri society and its history, Manipuri ponies are popular for their endurance and historical significance in warfare.

In view of the widening and deepening crisis situation in the state, around hundred participants took out an innovative pony rally on Wednesday, spreading the message of peace and harmony through the streets of Imphal West.

The pony rally, jointly organized by the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association, Manipur Equestrian Association, and Manipur Pony Society, started from the Manipur Breeding Farm at Lamphelpat in Imphal West.

The peace rally passed through various significant locations, including the Imphal West deputy commissioner office complex, Uripok Kangchup road, and Thangmeiband, before culminating near the Pony farm situated close to the Central School in Lamphelpat.

The rally aimed to raise awareness about the prevailing situation in Manipur

and featured placards carrying messages such as "We want peace," "No separate administration," "Implement NRC," and "Manipur kaiba yaroy (Manipur cannot be partitioned)," among others

The participation of these magnificent animals and their human companions in the rally highlighted the collective determination of the people of Manipur to stand together and preserve the state's unity.

Speaking to the media on the sidelines of the rally, Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association president H Dilip highlighted the deep connection between horses and Manipur's history, dating back to ancient times.

Dilip emphasized the iconic role of ponies in safeguarding Manipur's boundaries and expressed that the rally conveyed a strong message of the people's commitment to preserving Manipur's integrity and opposing any division of the state.

"Let's learn to live in harmony together," he added as the communal unrest continued in the state and has claimed over 100 lives and rendered over 50,000 people displaced with thier houses and properties burned and destroyed.

*(Originally Published in Imphal Free Press)*

# For Peace And Harmony In South Asia, Some Lessons From Sikhism And Sufism

By M. ASHRAF HAIDARI

**THE** relationship between Sufism and Sikhism dates back to the time of Guru Nanak, who led a modest life of profound, spiritual devotion, focussed on building bridges of love, tolerance, co-existence, and harmony among peoples of diverse faiths and socio-economic status. He was so immersed in piety and teaching his disciples to live spiritually, honestly, and harmoniously that many of his Muslim contemporaries, especially Sufis, called him a true Muslim.

Guru Nanak traveled extensively — including to Mecca for the Haj, different provinces of Afghanistan, and Baghdad — in search of divine knowledge and mystic scholarship. This exposed him much more to Islam and its mystic schools of thought than to any other religion. And, of course, for 64 long years, one of Guru Nanak's closest companions was Mardanda, who remained a Muslim until he died. According to the custodian of the shrine of Miyan Mir in Lahore, Mardana's descendants still live there, and refer to themselves as Sikh-Muslims.

Guru Nanak left behind many Hindu and Muslim disciples, and each claimed him as theirs for he had lived with them so harmoniously and treated them so equally, so respectfully and so sincerely that neither side was willing to give up his

body to the other. Today, the shrine of Guru Nanak is visited not only by Sikhs but also by Hindus and Muslims, each seeking his blessings in their own ways.

It was in such a mutually reinforcing spiritual relationship, which had been evolving between Sufism and Sikhism, that Guru Arjan Dev invited Miyan Mir, a leading Sufi of his time and Pir of the Sufism's Qaderi Order, to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Indeed, the commonality of the values and principles, which the Gurus and Sufis had been teaching their followers, was so deep with a focus on humanism that the Guru Granth (the central religious text of Sikhism) includes 112 couplets and four hymns by Khwaja Fariduddin Ganjshakar, a prominent Sufi of the Chishti Order, who lived in Punjab during 1266 A.D. This signifies the deep relationship between Sufism and Sikhism, and the influence they had on each other.

Since the emergence of Sikhism in the 15th century, the differences between the Sikh and Muslim communities have been traced to realpolitik. Such differences have hardly emanated from the shared path which the Sufis and the Gurus followed to reach truth by serving the vicegerents of God on this earth, while inviting them to love, tolerate, and help one another.

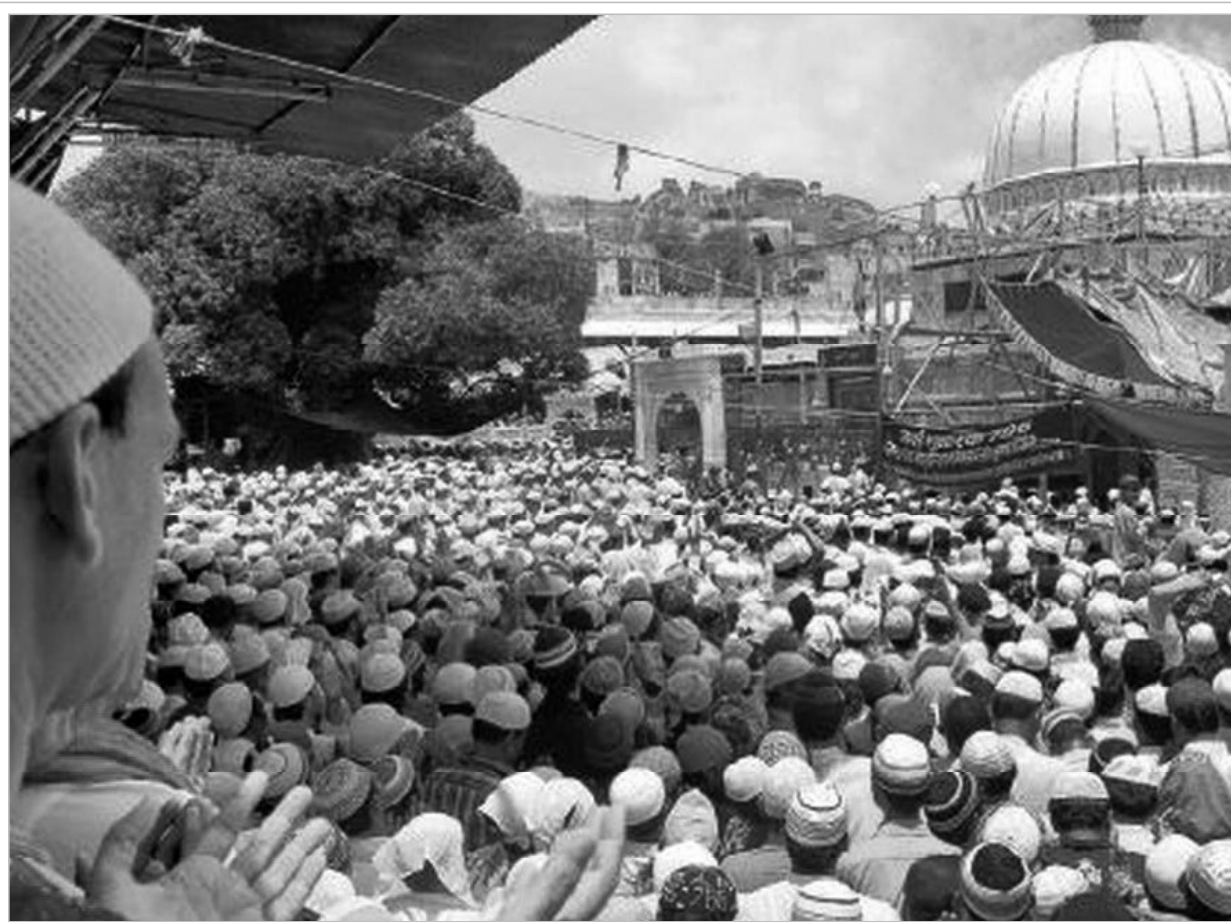
Afghanistan is the birthplace of many great Sufis, including the sultan-ul hind: Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. He was born in Chisht, Herat, in 1141 A.D., and settled down in Ajmer, following a dream in which Prophet Mohammed blessed him to do so. Afghanistan has recently proposed to establish a sister-city relationship between Chisht of Herat and Ajmer to honor the legacy and contributions of the great Sufi and to strengthen cultural ties between Afghanistan and India, based on the two countries' shared past and intertwined destiny.

The Chishti Order of Sufism — which influenced the thinking and teaching of Guru Nanak — interpreted religion in terms of human service, inviting its followers “to develop river-like generosity,

sun-like affection, and earth-like hospitality”.

To implement these universally good deeds, the followers of Chishti and other Orders of Sufism set up khanaqas, community centers with feeding and lodging facilities, which were built throughout rural India. The Chishti Order khanaqas welcomed anyone, regardless of faith, race, or caste, and offered them food and shelter, spiritual guidance, psychological support, and counseling. By creating egalitarian communities within a stratified society, the Sufis spread their teachings of love, spirituality and harmony. It was this example of Sufi brotherhood and equity that drew people to Islam.

In order to restore peace and harmony in South Asia today, we do not



need to look further afield. We simply should revisit the basic precepts of Sufism and Sikhism for lessons to be learned. In a shrinking, interdependent world, nations should tear down walls of hatred, hostility, and self-defeating, zero-sum designs to undermine each other. These artificial human obstacles to their collective progress should be replaced by honest, result-oriented efforts to achieve regional integration for peace and prosperity. That is what the great Sufis and Gurus of Central Asia and South Asia preached and promoted so that human tragedy was replaced by human harmony through universal human service and fraternity under one beneficent, merciful God and its many different, beautiful manifestations.

This year's Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Kathmandu debated the common challenges that confront the nations of South Asia. Extreme poverty, weak governance systems, lack of connectivity, lack of energy, and security threats continue to cause large-scale human suffering throughout the region, an otherwise naturally endowed and civilisational rich region. To address the root causes of these problems and to exploit this region's vast potential of natural and human resources for the collective security and prosperity of all their nations, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani called on his fellow SAARC leaders to "change the rules of the game and the playing field among the nations from confrontation to cooperation".

In effect, President Ghani maintained that so long as the South Asian nations remained locked up in a zero-sum mindset, undermining one another, they would hardly develop and advance together on a sustainable basis. He noted that to change the status quo was "the test of leadership". For inclusive, transformational leadership,

which South Asia lacks, we need to draw inspiration from the kind of leadership that Guru Nanak exhibited. He led his Hindu and Muslim followers by example, so much so that he erased from his followers' minds the differences of ethnicity, faith and caste. He unified them around an ethos that promoted the well-being of all humans.

Afghanistan, where many of this region's Sufis, Gurus, poets, and scholars were once born and made remarkable contributions to the region's shared, rich civilisation, has been a target of the so-called Muslims who daily terrorise innocent Afghans, burn down their schools and madaares, and carry out suicide terrorist attacks inside their mosques where the innocent and the poor worship God. They kill civilians in the name of a religion of peace, tolerance, harmony, and co-existence, whose true message the great Sufis of Afghanistan — like Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti — spread throughout South Asia.

Indeed, the Sufis' was the real jihad, whose message of universal brotherhood naturally resonated with and attracted believers of different faiths and social castes. Theirs was the straight path, the path of Prophet Mohammed. Today's killers of innocent Muslims and non-Muslims have deviated from that path, serving the political, short-sighted interests of realist states.

Because of this deviation from the noble teachings and traditions of Islam the terrorists that often kill and destroy, in the guise of jihad, would hardly succeed in their designs. Afghanistan didn't succumb to their brutal, inhumane atrocities against its people in the 1990s, which eventually spelt their own downfall. Nor would the country's courageous people ever cease their Greater Jihad to secure and rebuild their country, in partnership with the international community.

*(Originally Published in The Hindu)*

# A Grass-Roots Afghan Peace Movement Grows, Step By Step

By MUJIB MASHAL

**GHAZNI**, Afghanistan — As they march for peace through Afghan villages laced with roadside bombs and bottomless heartache, their numbers keep growing.

They come from all walks of life, ages 17 to 65. Among them is a high school student who went home to complete his final exams before rejoining the others; a poet who still carries in his chest one of the four bullets he was shot with; a bodybuilding champion who abandoned his gym and has lost 20 pounds of muscle on the journey. They are day laborers, farmers, retired army officers, a polio victim on crutches, a mechanic who was robbed of his sight by war.

Afghanistan's most striking grass-roots movement for peace in recent years started with just eight people. I started watching their movement then, when it was a hunger strike born out of pain and outrage at a suicide bombing that killed and wounded dozens in Helmand Province. A group of young men pitched a protest tent next to the carnage. Their blood had become cheap — too cheap, they said. For too long, they had been dying in silence.

Then they began marching north toward the capital through some of the most devastated parts of southern Afghanistan. We joined them this past Sunday, 30 days and 300 miles into their journey, as they rested their blistered feet in the cool of a small mosque near the city of Ghazni.

By that point, their numbers had grown to 65, and they kept walking through the Ramadan fast, taking no food or water through the 100-plus-degree daytime heat.

They are marching to say this: that the war has turned into a monster with a life of its own, feeding on the poor at the rate of more than 50 a day. The longer it drags on, the more difficult it becomes to reach a settlement. Killings turn into blood feuds that lead to more killings.

They want it to end, to give them a chance to live. At every stop, hundreds gather to hear their stories of loss and share their own.

One of their latest members is a shopkeeper from the western province of Herat named Mohamed Anwar. He arrived on a bus with three changes of clothing tucked under his arm and three pairs of prayer beads in his pocket.

"I told my wife I am going to join my friends," Mr. Anwar said.

Despite the simplicity of their protest, they know that bringing an end to four decades of war is no easy thing. There are so many competing interests: the Taliban insurgents emboldened by recent success, the harried and corruption-riddled Afghan government, the Americans and Europeans struggling for any positive outcome, the host of international players — Pakistan, Russia, Iran — for whom the war is a chessboard.



The beating heart of their march is each village mosque along the way, where they meet residents and rest for the night. They rely on the generosity of villagers who feed them, take their clothes home to wash and exchange stories.

In Shajoy district, the marchers met an older man whose daughter-in-law was abducted by a local police commander and married to one of his men. The woman's husband and his brother joined the Taliban. The brother's dead body came home within a week.

At a public bathhouse in the Moqor district of Ghazni Province, they met the commander of a small pro-government militia. A longtime rival of the man's family, now operating under the Taliban banner, had killed one of his uncles, then another, then another, then another. The man took up arms for the government because he feared he could be next.

In the countryside, both the Taliban and the government can take the role of oppressor. Sometimes it is not even clear who pulled the trigger.

As their numbers grow, the marchers' routine remains the same: walking for about 15 miles along the edge of a highway, in a single file, and then camping out at the next mosque. The walk is often lonely, through sparsely populated areas. During the daytime heat, they drag their feet. When the evening comes, the confidence returns in their steps.

When they approach a crowd, they begin their chants, followed by a description of who they are and what mosque they would be stopping at next if the onlookers — a young student stopping his bicycle, one foot on the ground; a mechanic covered in grease; a watermelon seller peeking above his pile of striped fruit — wanted to hear more.

"That our life is ugly!" one marcher, Bacha Khan Mauladad, shouts through a megaphone.

"It is war, it is war," the men respond.

Mr. Mauladad, 27, the oldest man in his family, will miss his sister's wedding next week to continue marching.

The youngest marcher, 17-year-old Mohammed Tahir, is usually at the head of the file, pushing a stroller packed with emergency necessities — a pair of crutches, umbrellas, a plastic rug, some spare sandals and a solar panel they use to charge their phones.

Among the items in his own backpack, Tahir carries a book, a comb, a bar of soap, a roll of toilet paper, a toothbrush, hair gel and packets of vitamin C.

One of the most cheerful marchers is Bahlul Patyal, a rotund pharmacist who left his drugstore and month-old infant daughter in Lashkar Gah to join. With the feet of some of the marchers having shed skin as many as four times, he has become a traveling medic in high demand.

Mr. Patyal carries a heavy sack of medicine on his back, and a first-aid kit. When they stop at a mosque to meet villagers, he holds a clinic in a quiet corner. Dipping a needle in antiseptic, he punctures blisters and patches them with thick balls of gauze.

When a marcher curls up in pain, Mr. Patyal gives him a bottle of cleaning alcohol to sniff. It helps with churning stomachs.

His humor helps ease other kinds of hurt.

"You know," he likes to say, "my wife told me that I shouldn't even dare coming back through the door if I don't lose weight on this march."

The only village where they were deprived of a meal was in the Nanani district of Ghazni. As they gathered around the food prepared by villagers, members of the Taliban's elite force — known as the Red Unit — arrived and told them to leave. An offensive was planned and fighting could start any minute. The Taliban were also angry because the men had walked through an area laced with mines that could have been activated any minute,



leaving their blood on the Taliban's hands.

Cities, however, have disappointed. The marchers find the political bickering and the superficial formalities there too much.

As they approached the Afghan capital, Kabul, the final destination for their message, they were nervous — about political opportunists who could hijack their message, and about the elites of a capital long separated from the pain of the countryside.

Iqbal Khyber, 27, a soft-spoken medical student, has become one of the marchers' leaders. In addressing crowds, he draws on the group's personal stories of loss, and recounts other testimonies they have heard during their journey.

"The tall buildings, the fancy cars, that is not our life," Mr. Khyber told a crowd of about 300 in a mosque near the city of Ghazni.

Pointing to the three men who were standing with him, and whose stories he went on to tell, he said: "This is our story."

One of them was Zaheer Ahmad, 21. He was 7 when American planes bombed their neighborhood in Greshk district in Helmand Province, leaving a crater so large that no trace of his father and uncle could be found.

As the war intensified in Helmand, their extended family moved to other provinces. Young Zaheer became a mechanic's apprentice in Kandahar. He was so good that by the time he was 16, he had opened his own shop.

One day, about four years ago, Zaheer booked two bus tickets and set off to the city of Herat, where he would drop off his 15-year-old sister at the house of another displaced relative. They were seated in the fourth row of the bus when a Taliban bomb detonated on the roadside.

Zaheer remembers feeling blood on his face, fire around him, and the screams of his sister. She did not survive. Zaheer's world, from that moment, went dark.

"I want to let out my pain," Zaheer

said. "There is a lot of pain tight inside me."

At night, some of the march leaders continued to meet locals and worked past midnight to plan for the next day. For the rest, there was little talk of war and peace. They were travelers, sharing stories, cigarettes, and tea in the cool breeze on the mosque porch.

Between drags on a cigarette, Ataullah Khan, a 65-year-old retired army colonel, talked about his moment of fame in 1980. While he was serving in western Afghanistan, a Russian photographer snapped a photo of him in uniform, his impressive mustache curled up, as he raised a child up for the camera. The photo made it to the cover of a magazine, and from there to frames on the walls of ice cream parlors in his hometown, Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar Province.

The bodybuilder, Zmaray Zaland, showed videos on his phone of an international competition he won. They giggled as they watched him perform in a skimpy Speedo, glistening with oil. He flexed his muscles, and shimmied in a little dance.

"I had never heard of that music, or done that dance in my life before that day," he told them.

Most of the marchers get barely four hours of sleep. Around 2:30 a.m., villagers bring a quick meal before the day's fast: a cup of sweetened milk, some cookies and bread. They pray the dawn prayer, grab their bags and set off single file into the soft dawn light.

Their 64th member, a sharp-eyed mason named Mohammed, arrived on Sunday with just a change of clothes knotted into the shawl on his back. He had tracked the march's progress on his phone during rest stops as he rode the bus toward them.

When asked how old he was, Mr. Mohammed did a calculation.

"I was 15, in eighth grade, when the war started," he said. "It's been 40 years since then."

*(Originally Published in The New York Times)*

# Finding Peace And Dhamma In Sri Lanka

By SURAJ YENGDE

AS many of you may know by now, I have been on a trip to the places where Buddha's Dhamma has originated, made an impact or is preserved and worshiped. In India, I spent days exploring the caves in the Western Ghats, in Bihar, and in Lumbini. But what I experienced in the past 10 days in Sri Lanka was stupendously surprising. I had heard about Sri Lanka through the stories of Samrat Ashok and Sri Lankan monks who visited Nanded and nearby places preaching the word of Lord Buddha. Sri Lanka also featured as a nation of cricketing geniuses. But nothing

prepared me for the cleanliness on the streets, beaches, and religious sites, and the kindness in hearts that is indoctrinated into the life of Sri Lankans. They are poor people but prideful and honorable.

I have not traveled extensively through the nooks and corners and certainly cannot validate the many political and internal matters of the country. But whatever I experienced left me with a feeling of pleasant disbelief. Can people be so kind without reason? Is there a certain unsaid expectation?



I was always on guard for potential scamsters and about 90 per cent of the time, I was proved wrong. I am used to regular businesspeople, taxis, auto drivers – pretty much anyone in the industry affiliated with serving tourists – as scamsters. Not that such was absent in Sri Lanka, but people here dealt with grace.

They did not impose by invading my privacy and making me uncomfortable. As soon as I landed in Colombo, beautiful smiling faces greeted me. But I was still unsure if this was a gesture or part of the job.

Everywhere I went, the Sri Lankans welcomed me. After realizing that I was Indian and not Sinhalese, the signature smile extended. They were even happier to know that I had a Buddhist background.

It has become their lifestyle even without having to think as a deliberate act. However, one Thero pointed out that this belief is devotional but not philosophical.

The sites where relics of the Buddha remain are the ones that are most revered.

Like Indians, Sri Lankans seem to be cognisant of the many invasions that happened in South India and how Hinduism was brought in to challenge Buddhism. They also faced the desecration of their sacred sites in the past and during the civil war. The history is visible in the ruins. But they did not hold contempt.

Despite the checkered role of India in their civil war, they did not hold that against me. The civil war was another of the grotesque episodes witnessed in countries with a colonial past across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The force of colonial powers, partnered with Brahmins and the dogma of ancient histories, culminated in the creation of a violent reaction. The majority-minority question has degraded most societies. Sri Lanka is no exception.

The political elite formed a ruthless ideology based on sentiments of regionalism and nationalism by savaging poor and vulnerable everyday, regular people. The

story of Sri Lanka's recent past is a testimony to this violent humanitarian crisis.

The common roots for all are the shrines of Buddhist reverence present across Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. The greatest Tamil Buddhist of the modern era, Iyothee Thass, also received ordination in the neighboring island.

I wondered what was the reason for the generosity, donation, kindness, and happiness among Sri Lankans. I couldn't help but think about the immense influence of Dhamma in the life of the people. It has become their lifestyle even without having to think of it as a deliberate act.

Certainly, I was told that certain sections of monkhood were corruptible and how robed men act to draw political power. Such pontiffs are the bane of society elsewhere in the world too.

This was a trip to the Dhamma land, which Indian Buddhists of the 4th century BCE chose as one that would preserve Buddha's relics and uphold Buddha's Dhamma. Samrat Ashok had sent his two precious children – Mahindra and Sanghmitra – to the land to spread Dhamma. I almost choked with emotion when I saw the place where Theri (nun) Sanghmitra stayed and the site of her cremation, where devotees now offered their prayers.

We bring back this great history by reviving, popularizing, and claiming Samrat Ashoka as one of our own. Starting September 30, the Buddhist Fraternity Council is carrying out the "Ashoka-Ambedkar Dhamma Yathra" through six states. The statue of Ashoka and a unique copy of the Buddha and His Dhamma authored by Dr Ambedkar will be gifted to viharas and devotees on the way to Nagpur.

One Thero (monk) pointed out that we have to know the "right Buddhism" and bring it into our lives. It must be the way out of our current dystopia and inequality.

*(Originally Published in The Indian Express)*

# How Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy Of Non-Violence Influenced Bangladesh

By JULIAN FRANCIS

IN India, October 2 is celebrated every year as Gandhi Jayanti to celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary. In 1969, Gandhi Centenary Year, I happened to be working as an agricultural volunteer based at a Gandhian ashram in Bodh Gaya – the birthplace of Buddhism – in Bihar.

This particular ashram had been founded by a dedicated follower of Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and it was set up to study all religions. At the early morning prayers, we would have a reading from the Qur'an one day, the Bible the next, and then on successive days from the Gita, the Granth Sahib (holy book of the Sikh religion), the Torah (sacred to the Jewish people) and readings from Buddhist scriptures.

From this experience, I have absorbed some teachings of all religions and I try to follow what Gandhi used to say: "Let the doors and windows of my house be open and let all the religions of the world blow through my house."

## **FRIENDSHIP TO ALL...**

Although India was divided on religious grounds in 1947, it is very significant that, as an independent country, Bangladesh promised to uphold and promote secularism. Even before Victory Day on December 16, 1971, I remember Tajuddin, Bangladesh's prime minister in exile, telling me in Kolkata that Bangladeshis of all faiths had suffered and

fought in the Liberation War and so Bangladesh would be for all faiths. He further told me that Islam clearly teaches to have respect for all religions.

From the very beginning, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman followed his, and now Bangladesh's, foreign policy, guided by "friendship to all, malice towards none", a very non-violent policy.

Gandhi is, of course, remembered for his marches and fasts for peace in both parts of Bengal when he spent many days trying to stop the communal killings in Noakhali and Kolkata in 1946, prior to the independence of India. Gandhi's walks or "padyatras" for peace inspired Vinoba Bhave to walk all over India in the 1950s and 1960s persuading big landlords to donate land to the "bhoodan" (land gift) movement, the land then being distributed to the landless and the lowest caste communities.

Where a significant amount of land was donated in a village, it was declared "gramdan" or village gift, and so it was that the Oxfam Gramdan Action Program was initiated in 1968 in Bihar following the Bihar famine of 1966/1967 and this program was based on four Gandhian ashrams in Bihar.

When we had quarterly progress meetings of the Oxfam Gramdan Action Program, occasionally Jayaprakash Narayan

would attend both to inspire us and make sure we were on the right track. Later, of course, he strongly supported Bangladesh's war of independence. Another Gandhian leader, who supported the formation of Bangladesh and Oxfam's work with the refugees, was the late Narayan Desai whose father had been Gandhi's secretary.

My life and work were definitely changed and benefitted by the influence of Gandhian thoughts and beliefs. And it was at the Samanvaya Ashram at Bodh Gaya that, as a young man of 23 years, I was influenced by the ashram leader, Dwarko Sundrani, who passed away last year at the age of 98 years. He was the last living disciple of Gandhi. He was very critical of the way in which Gandhi's birthday is celebrated each year.

#### **GANDHI'S PRINCIPLES**

A year before his death, Dwarko said in an interview: "Celebrating Gandhi's birth anniversary and then forgetting him

till his next birthday is not a way to express our gratitude and respect for him."

"We are not going to organize any event on Gandhi Jayanti this year, rather we will serve the helpless and needy people in the flood-stricken Bihar," Dwarko said. "Why? Because this is what Gandhi would have done if he was alive."

"Instead of celebrating Gandhi's birth anniversary, we will be serving people," he said. "What is the use of organizing seminars and workshops and reading his autobiography if we do not implement the teachings of Gandhi in our daily lives?"

Although Bangabandhu's life witnessed a great deal of violence and Bangladesh itself emerged after a bloody struggle, Bangabandhu certainly tried to follow Gandhi's policy of non-violence during his life. Sadly, however, he and his family members experienced a most violent death.

*(Originally Published in Dhaka Tribune)*

## **Nobel Peace Prize 2023 for Iranian Activist:**

Nargis Muhammadi, Iranian human rights activist and deputy head of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, is the 19th woman in the world and the second Iranian woman to win the coveted Nobel Peace Prize after Human Rights activist, Shirin Ebadi, who won the award in 2003. Since 2011, muhammadi has received several jail sentences and is currently behind the bars at Tehran's notorious Evin prison for fighting oppression against women in Iran. The activist has been sentenced to consecutive prison terms on national-security related charges including 'spreading propaganda against the system' and 'gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security'. Whereas, the supporters commented that Muhammadi had been held solely for the peaceful exercise of her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.





# The Future Of Poetry

By **CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL**



*....Continued from previous issue*

**THIS** tremendous revolutionary transition, in which the whole superstructure is "more or less rapidly transformed," is not accomplished in the realm of ideology by a simple instantaneous movement. The transition is a material one, a change of a whole system of productive forces and social relations, and these material movements are reflected in men's consciousnesses where all struggles are fought out to an issue. This transition has only begun, but already its effects are felt throughout the sphere of art, in all the variety and rich development of the struggle. It is impossible to understand modern art without some understanding, not only of the nature of the revolution, but also of future society, the pressure towards which is expressed in the trajectory of every flying fragment from the explosion taking place below the level of consciousness.

We speak of proletarian art; it is an art which expresses the movement of the proletarian class itself, and this movement is to annihilate its existence as a class by becoming coincident with society as a whole. It was the rôle of class society to gather at one pole all consciousness and so enrich the development of science and art. How then could proletarian art exist, as a higher form than bourgeois art, before proletarian society had developed its own distinctive consciousness? And this could only happen in any full measure when proletarian freedom had exceeded bourgeois freedom – for consciousness is the reflection in ideology

of the social product which secures its existence. Art also is a productive problem.

Proletarian consciousness, when it has even equalled bourgeois consciousness, will be of a higher quality, for the reason that bourgeois freedom and consciousness was the monopoly of one class in society and expressed only the aspirations and aims of that class. Bourgeois art, because of this, is the art of a man, half of whose organism has been cut away. The bourgeois class is not a class or a minority in the sense that it is a group of men more or less taken at random: such men may excellently express in any sphere a complete and rounded consciousness of reality – artists or scientists in any society will be such a minority. But the bourgeois class is an economic class – a class defined by a difference in its whole material surroundings and mode of life; it is a class, not a self-sufficient society. It therefore handles only part of the concrete living of society. The rest of life's movement goes out into the eternal night of the other class and returns from it into the day of consciousness, transformed – no bourgeois knows how. To know how to cease to be a bourgeois. Hence the final incompleteness of bourgeois vision, and as the material contradiction which is the cause of the separation of classes increases, so the gap in thinking and acting widens. Social consciousness is torn from social action like flesh from bone. The ravages in modern consciousness show that man can hardly endure the pangs of this dismemberment.

The consciousness which remains adhering to the pole of the ruling class contracts and stiffens because it is



separated from its organic nexus. It becomes academic, reactionary and fascist and petrifies in a living death. The bulk of artistic consciousness cannot survive this fission. A part is attracted – by all the blindness and instinct in it – to the pole of the exploited class, but the effect of this is to explode the whole field of consciousness into fragments. This unendurable tension is shown in the chaotic and intoxicated confusion of all sincere modern bourgeois art, decomposing and whirling about in a flux of perplexed agony. It is expressed by the cries of the Lawrences and their followers, demanding a release from the torments of intellectual consciousness; and the schizophrenic vision of Joyce, condemning the whole Witches' Sabbath of bourgeois experience.

Pulled to the opposite pole by instinct and dumb experience, retained there and clarified by the organizing force of the proletariat's life, part of the bourgeois artistic consciousness separates out, adhering to the pole of the exploited and revolutionary class. It fuses there with such consciousness as has already formed during the developing process of their separation: this already formed consciousness is scientific rather than artistic; intellectual and active rather than emotional and expressive.

This new consciousness gradually attracts all the dispersed elements of the old. The pattern of the old consciousness almost vanishes. Organized along the "lines of force" of the bourgeois categories, it was necessary that it be wholly broken up before the old elements could enter into a richer pattern, a pattern that now, becomes the creation, not of a limited part of society but of a class which has expanded to include the whole of concrete living. This expansion will be evidenced in the fuller content of the new consciousness, which will now be fed by the whole process of human reality and can therefore blossom as organically as a flower, just as it did in tribal society, but with all the

technical elaboration evolved since then. Proletarian art in realizing itself will become communist art.

This process is simply a parallel in the sphere of ideology to what will take place in the sphere of material economy. Here the elements of bourgeois production, the productive forces, are bursting into anarchy as a result of the repulsive movement between the poles of the classes, generated by the development of the categories of bourgeois economy. Only when these are dissolved can the elements be arranged in the more fruitful organization of socialism, but meanwhile the first clarifying outline of the forms of socialist economy has already appeared as an organizing power at the proletarian pole, developing from trade unions to soviets of workers' powers.

All this is fought out in the consciousnesses of men. In the sphere of art this appears as the fugitive or confused alliances of bourgeois artists with the proletariat, and the emergence (at first within the limits of bourgeois technique) of proletarian artists.

The bourgeois artist has three possible rôles in relation to the proletariat – opposition, alliance or assimilation. Opposition means a return to discarded categories: it is no longer possible to return to the discarded forms of yesterday; they have annihilated themselves. It is necessary to "regress" and return to almost mythological themes, to interpret the world in terms of the blood and the unconsciousness. It is necessary to barbarise both the ego and the external world in order to find a sanction for an opposition which can only be an alliance with the privileged forces of reaction. This attempt to roll history back gives us Spenglerian, "Aryan" and Fascist art.

Most bourgeois artists are at present treading the road of alliance – Gide in France; Day Lewis, Auden and Spender in this country – and many of the *surréalistes*

have signed the same treaty. Such an alliance can only be an “anarchist” alliance. The bourgeois class cannot generate any higher organization than that which it has generated – the organization of the nationalist State, which reaches its extremest form in the Fascist State. If, therefore, any artists reject this organization and become revolutionary, they can only be organized in the higher forms created by the proletariat. But this is the road of assimilation, and we are now discussing bourgeois artists who enter into an alliance, which means they do not enter the proletarian organization but remain outside the ranks as “fellow travelers.” Their attitude to existing society therefore can only be destructive – it is anarchist, nihilist and *surréaliste*. They often glorify the revolution as a kind of giant explosion which will blow up everything they feel to be hampering them. But they have no constructive theory – I mean as artists: they may as economists accept the economic categories of socialism, but as artists they cannot see the new forms and contents of an art which will replace bourgeois art.

They know “something is to come” after this giant firework display of the Revolution, but they do not feel with the clarity of an artist the specific beauty of this new concrete living, for they are by definition cut off from the organization which is to realize it, and which therefore alone holds in its bosom the nascent outlines of the future. They must put “something” there in the future, and they tend to put their own vague aspirations for bourgeois freedom and bourgeois equality. They attempt to visualize the brave new world in terms of their desires: this is in appearance not so different from the Fascist haters of communism, who attempt to hold back the new world to the measure of their desires. In both cases a sketch of the future is produced which is curiously pathological and spiritually hysterical; but in the one case it is evolving

backwards, in the other case it is full of forward movement and blind presage.

Of course this anarchic position of the contemporary bourgeois artist is only a variant of the old tragedy of bourgeois revolt. At each stage the bourgeois revolts against the system by the assertion of contradictory categories which only hasten on the advance of the things he hates. But it is a new variant of the tragedy. Actively to help on the development of the bourgeois economy at this final stage is to help in its destruction; hence these allies of the proletariat are genuine revolutionaries and the destructive element in their activity is not fake, it is real and complete. Their cleavage arises from the impossibility of a constructive approach to the Revolution.

This Trotsky-like element in their orientation expresses itself in many ways. The younger are Romantic Revolutionaries: it is the wild and destructive part of revolution that seems to them most picturesque: and in many cases it is evident that a revolution without violence would be disappointing. Baudelaire expressed this revolutionary spirit which is anarchic in an extreme form when he said, referring to his fighting at the barricades in 1848: “Moi, quand je consens à être républicain, je fais le mal le sachant je dis: Vive la Révolution! comme je dirais: Vive la Destruction! Vive la Mort”

It gives even the revolutionary element in their art a Fascist tinge, because they draw their hate at the same source, petty bourgeois suffering from bourgeois development. However, with them this hate is directed against its true source, capitalism, whereas with the Fascists it is directed against mythical sources – Marxists, Jews, and other nations. (The destructive element in genuinely proletarian art arises from proletarian suffering, which is a different kind of misery.)

On the constructive side the affective context of their work is often vague, disoriented and confused: it always

conceals in some form or other a demand for "freedom for me" or "freedom from social restraints." There is a slightly anxious preoccupation with personal liberties and a scurrying hither and thither for reassurances or corrections in the proletarian revolutionary theory because of its suspicious deviations from petty bourgeois limitations and ideals.

This is a source of confusion in their art, which too often reduces it to chaos, or may even silence them. It must be understood that this "refusal" to be assimilated in the proletarian organization does not necessarily mean that they stand completely outside the proletarian revolutionary ranks. The proletarian revolution takes place under the hegemony of the proletariat; and this means that these artists must accept to some degree the marching orders of the proletarian general staff unless they are to condemn themselves to complete nullity in action, which few of them now do. They must work with the proletariat somehow, and this necessarily involves their accepting the obligations of united action. This is educative and has had, for example, a considerable effect on Spender and Day Lewis. In some cases it may even extend to their joining the party of the proletariat – the Communist Party – but the extreme reluctance of most of these artists to take this step is symptomatic. Nonetheless, even if they join the party, this anarchist quality in their alliance takes a characteristic form. They announce themselves as prepared to merge with the proletariat, to accept its theory and its organization, in every field of concrete living except that of art. Now this reservation – unimportant to an ordinary man – is absolutely disastrous for an artist, precisely because his most important function is to be an artist. It leads to a gradual separation between his living and his art – his living as a proletarian diverging increasingly from his art as a bourgeois. All his proletarian

aspirations gather at one pole, all his bourgeois art at the other. Of course this separation cannot take place without a mutual distortion. His proletarian living bursts into his art in the form of crude and grotesque scraps of Marxist phraseology and the mechanical application of the living proletarian theory – this is very clearly seen in the three English poets most closely associated with the revolutionary movement. His bourgeois art bursts into his proletarian living in the form of extraordinary and quite unnecessary outbursts of bourgeois "independence" and indiscipline or quite apparent bourgeois distortions of the party's revolutionary theory. It leads to an unconscious dishonesty in his art – as of a man exploiting the revolution for his own ends. This is due to the fact that he sees the revolution as a path to a bourgeois heaven and is aware that his fellow revolutionaries have different ideas. However, he is prepared to co-operate for the sake of overthrowing the present system. This is only dishonest because it is unconscious – if open, it would be a fair working alliance, an acknowledged treaty like that which politically unites the different parties of the People's Front.

Since the reservation extends chiefly to the field of art, this artist's main preoccupation with the revolution is to secure guarantees of his freedom in the field of art after the revolution. He is not at all concerned about what would to most people seem more important – his freedom in concrete living. He understands that his other activities will be freer then, because in these other matters he already has a proletarian point of view. He is concerned as to whether art will be free, whether there will be a "censorship" on art. All his conceptions of freedom are in fact summed up in one word – "censorship." He goes to Russia not so much to see if the people are free, but if the artists are "interfered with" by the authorities. And this leads him to a typically bourgeois conception

of the artist as a man whose rôle is to be a lone wolf, a man who realises beauty for society only because he is exempt from contemporary social restraints; and he attempts to patchwork this conception into proletarian theory.

Of course this is not peculiar to the artist. Scientists, for example, will make an alliance with the proletariat in the same way; they make reservations only in the field of science. They go to Russia prepared to “sacrifice” everything, provided scientific theory is not interfered with. They develop a typically bourgeois conception of the scientist as a “lone wolf.” And this extends to everyone – teachers, peasants, administrators, historians, actors, economists, soldiers and factory managers who see the necessity of an alliance with the proletariat, freely and consciously choose it, and are prepared to accept proletarian leadership in every field except the one which is valuable to them, and where they demand the retention of bourgeois categories. The fact that if all these different petty bourgeois claims were granted they would, when lumped together, negate any proletarian society at all, and simply equal the retention of the present system against which they revolt, does not of course affect the individuals who make the demand, for they have carefully segregated their particular fields of interest from the field of life as a whole, and the artist is, for example, quite content to see the scientist proletarianised. It is for this very reason that the more the petty bourgeois becomes revolutionary, the less he can operate in his own organisations with other bourgeois revolutionaries, and the more he becomes an individual under the hegemony of the proletariat.

This dichotomy between life and the most valued function is only possible because the development of bourgeois culture has produced a flying apart of all ideology into separate spheres of art, philosophy, physics,

psychology, history, biology, economics, music, anthropology and the like which, as they increase their internal organisation and achievement, mutually repel each other and increase the general confusion. This is merely an equivalent in the field of thought of the way in which organisation within the factory has increased disorganisation between the factory; it is the struggle of productive forces with productive relations; it is the quarrel of real elements with bourgeois categories; it is part of the basic contradiction of capitalism. The task of the proletariat is just as much to integrate this ideological confusion and raise it to a new level of consciousness, as it is to integrate the economic confusion and raise it to a new level of production. One task is the counterpart of the other, and both have a common aim – to win more freedom for humanity.

To all these bourgeois revolutionaries the conscious proletariat therefore addresses the same kind of words:

“Your conception of freedom, because it is rooted in a part society, is also partial. All consciousness is determined by the society which produces it, but because you are ignorant of this mode of determination, you imagine your consciousness to be free and not determined by your experience and history. This illusion you exhibit so proudly is the badge of your slavery to yesterday, for if you could see those causes which determine your thought, you would be like us, on the road to freedom. The recognition of necessity in society is the only passage to social freedom.

“But when we say that consciousness is determined by the society which produces it, we say that thought is ultimately inseparable from concrete living, from practice. Each secures and develops the freedom of the other. You think that by separating theory from practice – and from the social obligations and forms that go with practice – you are making

thought free from 'censorship'. You hope to segregate thought from life, and so, by surrendering everything but this, in some way preserve a part of man's freedom, like the man who wrapped his talent in a napkin rather than adventure it in the market. However, freedom is not a substance to be preserved and isolated but a force generated in an active struggle with the concrete problems of living. You would deliver thought to the bondage of unconscious bourgeois categories; you would rob practice of its soul.

"There is no neutral world of art, free from categories or determining causes. Art is a social activity. Yours is the fallacious freedom of dream, which imagines itself spontaneous when it is rigidly determined by forces outside consciousness. You must choose between class art which is unconscious of its causality and is therefore to that extent false and unfree, and proletarian art which is becoming conscious of its causality and will therefore emerge as the truly free art of communism. There is no classless art except communist art, and that is not yet born; and class art to-day, unless it is proletarian, can only be the art of a dying class.

"We shall not cease to criticize the bourgeois content of your art. You indignantly reject these 'economic' categories, not because they are incorrect but because they are economic. But what are correct economic categories except categories drawn from concrete living? Ours is simply a demand that you should square life with art and art with life, that you should make art living. Cannot you see that their separation is precisely what is evil and bourgeois? Cannot you see that in this one matter you line up with our enemies – you, our ally – which is why on this point we fight your theory so bitterly?

"Our demand – that your art should be proletarian – is not a demand that you apply dogmatic categories and Marxist phrases to art. To do so would be bourgeois. We ask that you should really

live in the new world and not leave your soul behind in the past. It is your artist's soul for which we value you; and how can your soul be in the new world if your art is bourgeois? We shall know that this transition has taken place when your art has become living; then it will be proletarian. Then we shall cease to criticize it for its deadness.

"Ours is not a demand that you should accept in the realm of art what you call proletarian dictatorship. On the contrary, we shall say you are still bourgeois as long as you impose a proletarian dictatorship on yourself and import formulations torn from other fields of proletarian ideology to apply them mechanically to art. It is a demand that you, an artist, become proletarian leader in the field of art; that you do not take either of these easy roads which are in essence the same – or mechanically shuffling the outworn categories of bourgeois art or mechanically importing the categories of other proletarian spheres. You must take the difficult creative road – that of refashioning the categories and technique of art so that it expresses the new world coming into being and is part of its realization. Then we shall say your art is proletarian and living; then we shall say, your soul has left the past – it has dragged the past into the present and forced the realization of the future. You are not now 'just an artist' (which means in fact a bourgeois artist); you have become a proletarian artist."

The proletariat addresses what is in substance the same message to the scientist, the engineer, the factory manager, the historian and the economist. But in each case the message is not understood; it is regarded as formal or even insincere. The debate cannot be solved in theory, for the essence of this dispute is that the antagonists live in two worlds – one of bourgeois categories and the other of proletarian. It can, however, be solved in



the world of practice, for both are living in the same real world. Hence the progress of the socialist revolution hastens the assimilation of its bourgeois allies. Still, the bourgeois consciousness drags at the bourgeois revolutionary and produces in certain characters a hopeless cleavage, which makes the degeneration of some of its leaders a law of revolution. The record of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev are examples of how this may lead to complete treachery. On the other hand it may act as a "drag" to hold back the artist from full ripening. The lives and work of Yessenin, Mayakovsky, Pilnyak and Yury Olesha are examples of the conflict involved in this inability to recast creatively the categories of bourgeois art after the Revolution. Meanwhile, at the proletarian pole the whole process of assimilation is hastened by the development of the socialist revolution.

On the one hand men with proletarian lives attempt to interpret these in terms of existing bourgeois categories, that is, they use the already existing bourgeois artistic technique. Necessarily marked at first by an uncertainty, a poverty in handling alien categories, this attempt gives rise to what is sometimes regarded as being essentially proletarian art, although it is really an art in transition. This art has a simplicity and openness of theme which goes with a certain crudity and clumsiness in handling the technique; rather like a proletarian occupying for the first time a rôle in administration which hitherto had been peculiarly the prerogative of the bourgeois. Yet it is by this means that bourgeois technique and bourgeois

administration will be lifted to a new level by a laborious refashioning, in which at first every mistake is made except the fatal bourgeois mistakes.

On the other hand artists with bourgeois consciousnesses attempt to refashion these in order to express proletarian life. These meet the others, as it were, tunneling from the opposite side. One group attempts to push proletarian living (practice) into bourgeois consciousness (theory); the other to push bourgeois consciousness into proletarian living. Both tasks demand a complete refashioning of consciousness and neither can be successful alone. The bourgeois attempt produces a characteristic art which is also sometimes regarded as really proletarian art instead of being bourgeois art in transition, an art in which the rich but vague, fumbling and disorganized elements in bourgeois art are imperfectly transformed into large, concrete, proletarian realities.

Great proletarian art can only arise from a synthesis of the two, from the complete assimilation after breakdown of the old consciousness by the proletariat, which assimilation raises that consciousness to a new level, the level of communist consciousness.

Because then the proletariat has become coincident with the whole of society, this consciousness is no longer partial and torn apart from life, like flesh from bone. Society and its reflection in man is no longer rent and wounded. Art returns life, and becomes a reality to all men.

*to be continued...*

*Courtesy : Illusion and Reality*

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