

Star Literature

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Event

World Festival of Poets-2000

"There now, comes the 21st Century! Looking Forward to a new century of poetry"

By A Z M Haider

The World Festival of Poets-2000, organised early this month to commemorate the 50th anniversary of CHIKYU, a poetry magazine of Japan, singled out as its theme "There now, comes the 21st Century! Looking forward to a new century of poetry". Raising this slogan, the Festival of Poets dwell on the role and responsibility of poets in the current century and sent a clarion call to poets all over the world to strive for a new global order based on love, peace, amity and universal fraternity and shorn of conflict, tension and ruthless wars as are being fought in Bosnia, Palestine, Kashmir and elsewhere in the world.

Staged on land of the rising sun, the festival drew a crowd of 150 poets from 40 countries. Fazal Shahabuddin, a major poet of Bangladesh and editor of Kobikantha, the lone poetry magazine in Bengali language, was invited to take part in the 3-day festival beginning on November 3, 2000. The galaxy of poets who participated in the festival included Ales Debeljak (Slovenia), Kim Namjo (Korea), Jorge Timossi (Cuba), Hammen A Awad (Palestine), Satoko Tamura (Japan), Kazuko Shirashi (Japan), Humberto Akabal (Guatemala), Anthony Baha (Ghana), Author Binard (USA), Matthias Kneip (Germany), Paolo Ruffilli (Italy), Kama Kamanda (Congo), Teru Hidaka (Japan), Anise Coltz (Luxembourg), Philip Hammill (Australia) etc.

The World Congress of Poets lent generous support to CHIKYU in organising this convocation of poets. The editor of CHIKYU and an important poet of Japan, Yutaka Akiya, who happened to be an influential member of the World Congress of Poets managed to mobilise its support for CHIKYU in organising this grand festival.

Yutaka Akiya struck the keynote of the festival when he recited a self-composed poem at the opening session of the festival to give vent to his pent-up feelings to mankind standing on the threshold of the new millennium.



Beaming Fazal with a section of participating poets at the World Festival of Poets 2000 held at Hanu City, Tokyo.

"We have languished for love and adventure

And longed for wandering alone

Our mind stood on days of the 20th century

Covered with thunder and clouds like poems of Kastner

In the wintry morning the war broke out

I went to the front as a soldier

Peace visited the cities devastated by civilisation

Tall foreign soldiers came too

The doors of the Church were closed among burnt poplar trees

The sky of the evening glow across the ruins

What did I sing at that time?

Of war?

Of peace?

Empty voices are only trembling in my ears

Our words are still hungry in the endless flame of wars

It is fifty years since then

You, foreign poets, have come through the autumnal light

A poet with a musical instru-

ment in your arms from the desert

A poet for Haiku from the wasteland

A poet from yellow soil with a deep scar on your breast

Oh, Debeljak, a missing poet in the dark

What will you sing in this age of crisis?

Our songs draw a large arc

As the watchtower turns round."

(translated by Takashi Ishira from Japan)

parts of the world descended upon Tokyo to chart out their course of action for the emerging world order bedevilled by utter disappointment and frightful confusion.

Right from the outset or perhaps from a decade or two before its advent the world has started slipping into the grip of soulless technologies. The Information Technology, for instance, with its remorseless strides is on the verge of devouring our planet. A section of humanity, as has been stated in the course of discussion at the Tokyo festival of poets, is labouring under the impression that poetry is gradually turning helpless and redundant in the emerging world order infested by a large variety of technologies. But these technologies, despite their salutary impact on the functional side of human life, have failed to touch the cord of human emotion. These technologies have fostered material advancement of man. But they have flopped in fathoming the dark depth of his soul and contributing to its edification. People

are, therefore, sick and tired of relentless headway being made by soulless technologies in the work-a-day world and consequently looking for escape to the world of poesy which sublimates human soul and transcends it to a serene and blessed land of peace, love and solace. In this world of science and technology machine takes precedence over spirit. Poetry, which provides food for soul, contributes to its enrichment as well as to invigoration of spirit.

The World Festival of Poets dwelt exhaustively on various attributes of poetry namely sound, motion and imagery. It is because of these characteristics that poetry retains an overpowering appeal to mind and spirit of men. Thus the domain of poetry begins from the point where the ruthless race of science and technology ends. Poetry is like an oasis at which a man, like a traveller, tired of trudge in the Sahara of life, gazes with deep longing for little rest and respite. In effect, poetry provides peace and spiritual edification to man in his suffering and suffocating agony.

T S Eliot stated a real poem should be felt before it is understood. What Eliot wanted to drive at through his statement was that a reader should be able to drink deep into the fountain of poetry before trying to decipher its diction to comprehend its inmost thought. Eliot's "The love song of J Alfred Prufrock" or metaphysical songs contained in Tagore's *Gitanjali* cause drowsy numbness in the heart of a reader despite his inability to pierce through diction and imagery deployed in these immortal verses with universal appeal. The World Festival of Poets discussed poetry in all its ramifications and was found to be in agreement with the observation made by T S Eliot about half a century ago.

Illustrating Eliot's contention of poetry, Fazal Shahabuddin recited the self-composed poem written in Bengali. After he concluded the poem entitled "The loneliness of a poet" a number of poets confessed to Fazal that



Fazal Shahabuddin flanked by German poet Tobias Burghardt (M) and Argentine poet Kirokan (R).

they could get into the core of the poem without having nodding acquaintance with Bengali language. It was the sound of the poem that worked like a magic on the poets present there and they felt what the poem was all about without learning the language in which it was written.

Addressing the festival Fazal later said, "A poet through his works gives vent to his experiences which are beyond ordinary human imagination and which help mankind establish a very deep, intense and never-ending relationship with nature. And in this process to discover a vision wherein one can encounter that moment when one can like Eliot see the 'third who always walks beside him'. It is this third person between a poet and nature who begins his strides from the point where science and technology should enable us to stage World Poetry Festival in Bangladesh.

It is precisely because of this reason, notwithstanding incapable influence of technologies in this new age of information, that the impact of poetry can be

seen that the poem can be helped to initiate the move. Is it very difficult for Kabikanta to stage a poetry festival of an international scale?

O being permitted, Rouf went to see Gupta in jail on condition that discussions would be conducted in English in the presence of an official of the Ministry of Justice. On the specified date and time, Rouf met Gupta in the jail and also took along a meal for him.

Gupta was brought before Rouf in one of the rooms. Rouf asked Gupta in Urdu, "How are you? Are you having any problem in the jail?" As Gupta wanted to explain (in Urdu) the difficult situation in the jail, in view of the insufficient heating system, the Romanian officer concerned immediately intervened and requested them to speak in English. In the meantime, Gupta uttered bad words in Urdu about the behaviour of the police and the inhuman conditions in the jail. Knowing fully well that he would be beaten or harassed as soon as Rouf left the place, Gupta spoke in Urdu against the regime, which was totally corrupt and immoral.

After the meeting, which lasted 15 minutes, Rouf came back to the office.

On the suggestion of Gupta, Rouf sought a meeting with an official in the Ministry of Justice for the release of Gupta, who had already spent about a year in the jail for a minor offence.

It was difficult to fix an appointment with a bureaucratic official in Romania. However, Rouf managed to get an appointment with a Director in the Ministry of Justice. One day, Rouf went to the Ministry of Justice and was received by Vassalie in the Ministry of Justice.

Rouf took the privilege to open the dialogue with regard to Gupta's release. Mr. Vassalie showed him Gupta's file. The Romanian authority considered Gupta to be a criminal. Not only foreign currency, alcohol and cigarettes had been found in his room, he had also beaten the police physically. Finally, an interesting deal was made if Gupta was prepared to pay US\$ 10,000 he would be released. The calculation was made on the basis of the jail term. This kind of system was unheard of Gupta's sister, Jharna, and his brother-in-law flew from Germany where the brother-in-law was assigned in research work with the Ford Motor Company. Gupta's sister met Rouf to find out the position of Gupta's case and she expressed the wish to visit her brother. Rouf arranged the meeting with Gupta for his sister. She discussed the matter with Gupta and was prepared to pay US\$ 5000. Gupta told his sister very firmly that he would only take a loan from his sister. He did not want a favour. If they could arrange US\$ 9000, he would be prepared to pay it back within one month of his release. Gupta's sister apparently was offended on hearing such remarks. Jharna spoke to Rouf in tears. Jharna said, "I was shocked by the way my brother talked to me. Gupta was our elder brothers, and loved one, but the way he talked to me transpires that I belong to a third family. Let him do it the way he thinks better. I am no more interested in my brother."

In Ajay's absence she used to come and sit beside her. She gradually opened herself up and shared all secrets of her life with her as if she were her friend. "Believe me auntie," she said, "I was innocent - some kind of a fool when I got married. I did not even reach my 18th birthday then. My parents found the groom's family an aristocratic one and his earning a decent one. They never thought twice before pushing me into his hand, as they did not want to lose him. He was twice my age. He would neither read my mind nor would he allow me to do anything after my choice. At home I was as free as a butterfly. none would forbid me to do anything or impose any restriction on me. And here after marriage I was to watch every step of mine. Don't do this today, don't do that tomorrow etc. All the rules and regulations were meant for me only. On one hand I was slave to my inflow's wishes, on the other I had to surrender myself to my husband's desire whenever he wanted. To tell you the truth auntie I hated him so much. Yet I endured everything till he resorted to physical violence. I returned to my parents' home and that was for good. That scoundrel himself came to get the divorce papers signed by me. I got rid of him at last. There was only one regret however: he could not give me a child..."

Nowhere in sight... only...! Whenever asked he would always reply, "I'm not in a hurry." She wondered why he was not bringing this girl here for good observing all legal and social formalities when the latter was spending her whole day in his room. She would not mind that because by now she developed a kind of affection for her.

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In about one month's time, the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, declared clemency towards foreigners sentenced to serving a 5-year term in jail.

On hearing this news, one day Gabriela came to see Rouf at his office about the acquiring of Gupta's belongings which had been seized by the police. Mercedes old car, colour television, radio old clothes, video camera, typewriter, shoes (both male and female) and US\$ 1,500 in cash belonging to Gupta in the custody of the police.

Gupta gave a letter to Gabriela to get hold of the items which were lying in Rouf's office.

Rouf asked Gabriela how she had managed to get a letter from Gupta directing her to collect his personal belongings from Rouf's office. Rouf was not aware of the belongings as Gupta had been arrested long before the arrival of Rouf in Bucharest. Gabriela said, "I had been to jail to see Gupta when I was informed of the items. I visited Gupta two times but subsequently I was not allowed to visit him. This letter was posted by Gupta jail." It was written in the Romanian language.

The Romanian language originates from Latin. There is a similarity with French and Italian. Out of sheer curiosity, Rouf made a query to Gabriela: How was she permitted to see Shaha in jail as she was not related to him. Rouf came to know that no one could have access to some sensitive places, including jails, without prior permission. In this case, Gabriela succeeded to meet him in jail. Gabriela, in her reply, said that she had submitted an application to the jail authority as Gupta's girlfriend, indicating that both of them had agreed to marry on Gupta being released from jail.

To be continued

Fiction

An Asian Encounter with Romanian Communism

By Mohammad Amjad Hossain

Continued from earlier week

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After staying a couple of days, Jharna, accompanied by her husband, left for Germany the place of posting of her husband.

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To be continued

The Shrine of Lalan

By Obaidul Gani Chandan

Once upon a time innumerable Bauls had their abode in the shrine of Lalan Shah with love enfolded, and it's only by them this holy shrine of Lalan had so long been aply taken care of and nurtured.

Why then abruptly today the Bauls are going down on their fate? because they haven't any shelter in the shrine the Bauls are loitering hither and thither on the street.

The Shrine of Lalan Shah shouldn't go to any one's possession, this had long been an assembly of the Bauls this is where they should stay all in congregation.

Translated by Tito Choudhury