

# Writers trapped in a culture of non-dialogue

by Rajvinder Singh

**F**REEDOM of a nation strictly means political as well as cultural freedom. Not in the context of India, though. After 58 years of Independence writers and intellectuals, vanguards of culture, still roam about in disarray.

Encapsulated in the niches of their local language politics and harping on small groups serving their individual motives, they pursue petty interests, selling themselves and their works for peanuts.

Consequently, far from taking their rightful place in the public arena, they have not been able to establish a direct contact between their product, the book, and the reader even, to foster a socio-cultural partnership.

Such a partnership is of tremendous importance in the functioning of a secular democracy. It provides writers and intellectuals with cultural freedom and engagement necessary towards raising the consciousness and intellectual ability of the people, and helps carve out a thinking, democratic, coherent civic society.

Moreover, in a functioning democracy it cannot be the destiny of writers to be deprived of self-organisation and self-control needed to keep themselves free of party politics and regionalism. Otherwise their very scope of having an independent identity as writers would vanish altogether.

After all the onus of cultural well-being and mental upliftment of people in secular

democracies rests with independent thinkers which writers and intellectuals are, not with the state.

The root cause of cultural inertia among India's writers and intellectuals is not a calculated deprivation or state suppression, which in many countries is the case, but the fact that they have utterly failed to recognise the potentials of their intellectual power to perceive themselves as the fourth pillar of society with rights and duties towards it.

Consequently, they are non-existent as a secular think tank, though otherwise capable of preparing people to face challenges emanating from an ever-increasing complexity of economic, social and technological change.

This inertia has left the socio-cultural field onto forces detrimental to secularism and democracy, endangering thereby the fundamental setup of our giant multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural edifice we love as our nation.

These forces are cast-dividing political gurus intermingling with criminals and/or metaphysical gurus running their trades. Their monologues create a dumb society, countering thereby an otherwise needed nationwide culture of dialogue.

Day by day the world is becoming a less decent place. We must join our hands and minds to halt this ongoing socio-cultural and socio-ethical decline among people. An informed nationwide debate on the provisions and possibilities



of gross intellectual engagement in the day-to-day working of the society is imminent.

Therefore, a collective, dialogic fervour has to be ignited among writers. There is no alternative for writers to rise above their lingual and individual niches and indulge in an incessant dialogue aimed at creating a coherent India.

The recent emergence of India as an economic power has changed the socio-politico-economic scenario altogether, deepening the vertical divide among its population.

It is a professional duty of writers to act as a corrective, watch the plight and help safeguard the rights of the common people so that they are not crushed under the speedy wheels of an economic boom.

No economic development in a society can sustain itself without a supportive, equally important, cultural development walking in pace with it. Literature, more than any other feature of culture, is thought to be responsible for engaging wider public in dialogue to raise their vision and imagination, and

offer emotional and intellectual pleasures as well.

Hence, the need has never been grave and urgent as now towards a closer co-operation among writers of India to bundle together their energies nationwide, and bring about an intellectual synthesis to serve peace and harmony among various human walks in India.

There is another important dimension to that. Writers need not have any "false" selflessness and forget themselves as a deprived lot. In a country of more than a billion souls writers do not have any nationwide lobby whatsoever. They should step forward and incorporate their visions and voices to serve scholarship, but also demand their due.

Instead of throwing banana peels on each other's path, they should join hands and minds to develop a culture of dialogue and engagement, promote goodwill among themselves through intellectual exchanges throughout the country and get organised in a nationwide forum of writers constituting chapters of each Indian language.

At the same time they should stop expecting petty favours from the authorities. Rather they should get into dialogue with the authorities, ascertain their constitutional rights and form a lobby. That would also help ensure that the works they produce do not lag behind in quality and vitality to the works produced elsewhere in the world.

■ *The writer is a poet and a member of PEN International's German chapter engaged in dialogue of cultures*

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