

Acceptance Speech by Sri Shivarama Karanth

A VENTURE TOWARDS SATISFYING ONESELF

In thanking the Sahitya Akademi for the honour it has been pleased to confer on me this day, I express my deep sense of gratitude to it. This honour carries with it the assent of many fellow writers belonging to various provinces of India, as well as of persons, whose attitude towards literature may be different from mine. Hence a few words of explanation, as to what led me to dabble in literature, for the last sixty years continuously. This long stretch of time was a two-way evolution—one of my own personality and the other, of my attitude towards literature itself.

In the early beginnings, I used whatever capacity I had for language, as an instrument for exploiting the curiosity of my readers. My first piece of writing was a short detective story. This faculty I soon realised was nothing much to be proud of.

Being young and bent on social reform, I felt I should use my capacity for expression for such a purpose. I did so, for nearly a decade and produced numerous plays and one or two novels. This was a period when my sentiments had overtaken my capacity for understanding the problems of life. During this period and everafter, I have been a wanderer all over Karnataka and also beyond. I went around the country, with a discerning eye and a hunger for knowledge. The experiences I gathered made me feel that my earlier writings lacked authenticity. The characters and the situations I depicted looked too artificial to feel real. The causes of human misery in its various forms, have deeper roots in man's nature, as well as nurture. Trying to simplify such causes by giving them bold names like 'exploitation', 'dogmatism', 'orthodoxy', 'aggression', etc. would not serve my purpose of knowing reality that lay behind such factors. One's life time may not be enough to understand the very many factors that lie behind human misery.

All these factors made me realise, that apart from depending upon my own experiences, to understand and evaluate situations and characters that participate in the human drama, I should know much more about the very nature of human behaviour.

This is a responsible, as well as a heavy task. Cheap or easy speculations have no place here. This work not only needs an objective attitude towards life, but also a fund of knowledge about human behaviour under various circumstances, times, and climes. Assuming my experiences to be genuine, I shouldn't rush to announce that my analysis of the same is the only valid one.

Since man has to adjust his life to that of his society in order to function, with the least trouble, first of all he will have to accept its cultural values, with regard to what is good and bad about human actions. He may, or may not understand his cultural inheritance, but will have to blindly accept its dictates. Such a thing goes on in every society, due to people's acceptance of varied moral concepts, prevailing at the time. They too are inheritances of the past. With them there are standards set by the society on its own. There are also mandatory laws imposed by the state, to which this society belongs. Conflicts are bound to arise—between blind cultural inheritance, religious impositions, as well as social and mandatory laws imposed by the state. Habits acquired due to them, are mostly artificial in nature, and often clash with an individual's need for survival.

The present day society in which we now live is not a single group but an admixture of groups, each having its own cultural beliefs, and values regarding good and bad, and people belonging to different religious and ethnic groups, along with migratory people form the members of such a 'society' of which I mentioned earlier. Here an individual has to function under a number of situations. His own needs and impulses may not be able to reconcile with the very many rules that are posed before him. If he has grit he may openly defy such impositions, and be a target of fury of others, or in fear, practice duplicity, cunning, cleverness, etc., as substitutes for open rebellion or aggression. Even within one's own family of which everyone is a part, arise such clashes of interests. We all function under such a medley of contrasts, beliefs and entanglements in life.

When we look back towards our past, in India, our writers also tried to understand the causes of human conflicts and participant behaviour. They too wanted to understand the causes of joys and sorrows of mankind. They attributed them to one's past. The past is totally unknown as also the future. But it came in handy, to attribute every present-day pleasure and pain, to the unknown past. That is the law of Karma, operating like a millstone for every being on earth! But in a way it has made man escape the tedium of thinking over the causes of human joy or misery. This escape route was an intelligent guess work based on the disparity between man and man, or man and animal. One may be born blind, born poor, born with all undesirable circumstances, as opposed to having full faculties, wealth and cheerful surroundings all at the very start of life.

But this easy solution was not the only solution posed and accepted. Even when the law of Karma is supposed to operate mercilessly, for every being on earth, the Lord of the creation, reserved his own rights in-tact. Not even a straw shall move without his order. Every misdeed of man may also be attributed to the Lord's dominant will.

About ten thousand years ago, a few individuals of the human society, took a different path, by devising ways to avoid dangers posed by nature in providing food and shelter. They didn't want chances to dictate the terms of their life in providing shelters, and food. They learned to build shelters, cultivate crops, rear animals and practiced crafts that began to enrich their life. From that day onwards, all human societies began to live on their own, in spite of the law of Karma. Man began to produce food, feed his family, protect it against enemies and as far as possible, fight all hostile forces. That is why, a present day writer wants to assume the responsibility of finding out causes of human misery and conflicts; we don't pass on the credit for happiness to the

blessing of Gods, or unhappiness to the curses of impatient sages or malevolent spirits, or any other heavenly bodies or earthly spirits. Of course there may be a few exceptions, who still wish to consult the position of stars and planets.

We now have reached a stage where we have to determine what share nature as well as nurture have in shaping human misery, or happiness.

We in India are a highly orthodox people and so, have underplayed the role of nature in man's life. Man according to all religions has been God's choice child, for whose comforts and existence the rest of beings were created. For my own part, I have begun to realise that the socio-cultural mantle that man has inherited is only skin deep. From behind it operates animal nature which evolved through millions of years, before man appeared on the scene.

Hence trying to interpret experiences of my life, I have ceased to rely on speculative philosophies of every shade. They all mean little to me. Ideals such as 'eternal truth', 'the one and only goal', 'liberation from birth and death', etc. are beyond my capacity to understand. Scientists say that life on earth has been in existence since three and half billion years. The advent of man, in the evolutionary ladder began to appear some ten to 15 million years ago, and its final product, may be a million year old phenomena. If the vast stream of life could last that long, i.e. three and half billion years, without a purpose, goal, bother of liberation, etc., I for one would not like to join the band of wise men, who are keen on setting before men a postmortem goal of liberation to end all misery.

I as an individual am bound up with the stream of life, and am here to play my role. That role is something like the role of a single cell contributed to the functioning of a human body. This stream of life of which I am an infinitesimal part may have a goal of its own, if at all there be such a goal. But my capacity to understand it is beyond me. This entire stream of life on earth will cease to be, when earth's temperature drops as the sun cools down. It was not there before and won't be there some day in future.

So is my existence purely temporary and hence, needs no permanent solutions.

For me the present is everything. All around me are countless millions of other lives, who are sharing the same earth as myself. They too have their share in the riches of this earth, and also its miseries it can pose before them. So, I have to live in harmony with them. I don't want others to hurt me, or rob me, of my needs and so my religion should be to observe the same rules that I wish others to observe in respect of myself. That is all the philosophy I have for my individual guidance. This is simple enough, but much more complex is the job of understanding the nature of man. Most of our troubles are due to that. This needs the understanding of the nature of the animal too. Man is only an end product of the evolutionary ladder. A lot of it can be gleaned from recent advances in behavioural sciences. They certainly can point out, the boundary between nature and nurture. Understanding human behaviours is a formidable task and I dare not classify them under a few omnibus 'isms'. They are never so simple. My role as a writer, has to be a humble attempt, in analysing the causes of the 'human situation'. I should never exclude myself from the society, of which I am having my say.

Now as to my profession, as a writer let me say a few words. I belong to Karnataka and most of my writing is in Kannada. From the point of hunger or thirst for this profession that is displayed all around me. I feel that such persons should resort to some other job, other than writing, for quenching hunger or thirst. I started journalism and wrote so many stupid things, as humble offerings to the imaginary Goddess Sarasvati. I am sure she is absolutely ignorant of all Vernacular poets who thought that praising her was an indirect way of praising one-self.

If you don't want to fool yourself, that, to carry on the job of a householder, rear a family and bring up one's children I feel the profession of a writer is an extremely hazardous occupation. Many financially successful contemporaries of mine had other jobs with prestige and income from other sources! Lucky were such literary figures who rose from the professorial class, for they had a ready audience and a steady income from text books!

Believe me when I say, that on the completion of my sixtieth year of my life, I had enough popularity and more than enough debts. I rose to the heights of authorship after printing, publishing and selling my own books! This landed me in huge debts. Thanks to my admirers and inflated prices of printing machinery I escaped the dire consequences of my profession.

Now I have passed that stage, and know full well that an author can attain fame due to a large number of his countrymen reading his books by proxy. And so fame need not be the measuring yard of one's real achievements.

More than literary creations, I have been writing for the people books on various subjects, with material gathered from innumerable sources. That really makes me feel I have not wasted my life. The vast knowledge I have gained through the English language has enriched my life, and enabled me to understand the people and the world better.

My love for arts such as painting, drama, dance and music, etc., has given me pleasures that I could not otherwise have had. Nature around me has entertained me much of the time. More than that the friendship and affection which a few people have unstintingly offered me, have made me feel that there is no wealth that can compete in richness as affection. It is the one element that makes existence possible and bearable.

This token of affection, that writers of India have now offered me today is a sure sign that I haven't wasted my life. Now I leave you to wonder as to what a fellow, your recipient of that gift is!