

CONFERENCE/SEMINAR – REPORT

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The Temenos Conference 'The Voice of The Sacred In Our Time', jointly organised by the Temenos Academy, London, IIC and the IGNCA was held at IIC, New Delhi, 16-19th January 1997.



The Conference unfolded various aspects of the sacred mainly focussing on the issues like modernity and materialism and what they are doing to our present day civilization. Materialism has brought about a great change, to an extent that we find most of the present day youth blindly apeing the western ways and norms further diminishing their own culture and value system. The four days conference was an amalgamation of the Western and Indian thoughts bringing forth the various issues of the sacred into the forum.

The conference began with Dr. Karan Singh reading out H.R.H., Prince of Wales message : "The sacred traditions which form the basis of mankind's most civilised values remain as important today as they have always been. I am therefore particularly delighted that the Temenos Academy is holding it's seminar on the 'Voice Of The Sacred In Our Time', in India where civilizations have preserved from time immemorial an understanding and a profound sense of the importance of the sacred". Later in his inaugural address, Dr. Karan Singh said, "we are living in a moment in history which is unique. There has always been changes and transitions in human civilization from the very dawn of time". He further said that, "the science and technology over the last half of the century has so transformed life on this planet as to cut across all barriers of race, creed and nationality to bring about the possibility of a Global society of the planet Earth". He said that, "the ideal of Global society is not a new one. Thousands of years ago the seers of Upanishads came out with this extraordinary concept of *vasudev kutumbhka* – the whole world as a family". While concluding his address Dr. Karan Singh quoted Sufi Mystic Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, who talks of the birth of a new world :

Where ever I go there is tumult and shouting.

Where ever I turn, there are torches and candles.

For the world we look today is heavy and

in trivial, striving to give brith to the eternal world.

Dr. Kathleen Raine's keynote address beautifully expressed the various meanings, forms and content of the sacredness.

The session began with John Lane's paper based on his recent book 'A Snake's Tail Full of Ants', explaining about the present ills of the so-called civilization tracing it back to European history when mankind began to develop in the emerging town based merchant culture, crystallising their philosophy, aims and practice into the Renaissance where humanism substituted the Christian religion for the religion of progress. John Carey's Sacred Science and Cosmic Imagination In Early Christian Ireland explained about the distinctive genres in the literature of medieval Ireland in a form of story telling or voyage tale. The Narrative structure of these tales gives us an insight into the origin and the Pre-Christian otherworld

and the spirit of pilgrim ethos of the early Irish monasticism.

Dr. T.N. Khoshoo while speaking about Mother Earth and the voice of sacred said, "we have created a civilization which is destroying our own mother and the mother would be better off without us". He explained further, "the height of unnaturalness is epitomised by the fact that if we have money we can change all our organs that is human being without selective value system. What one needs is tons of money in order to get the organs transplanted and you are constructed – that is the state of technology today, some thing we can be very proud of but all the same something we are very anxious about". He said that, "Human being is indeed a unique act of creation by nature. It can recall the past experiences and can foresee the future, understand ethics and morality, privileges and obligations. We need very serious introspection because the enemy is within us. We can curb it by ethics and morality".

Ramesh Chandra Shah spoke on the Indian Tradition and Western concept of Knowledge, "knowledge as the conceptual controller of the Universe permitting no inappropriable mystery in things, persons and in other cultural religious tradition". Talking about the concept of the sacred, the uniqueness of Indian philosophy, works of W.B. Yeats, Coleridge, Sri Aurobindo and A.K. Coomaraswamy, he finally concluded his paper on the lines of William Blake :

"---Teach me, O Holy spirit, the testimony of Jesus !

Let me Comprehend wonderous things out of the Divine Law !

I behold Babylon in the opening streets of London.

I behold Jerusalem in ruins wandering about from house to house.

This I behold : the shudderings of death attend my steps.

I walk up and down in six thousand Years :

their events are present before me ..."

Sima Sharma's presentation based on Samuel Huntington's work on 'The Clash of Civilizations', presented the founding principles of cultures, cultures of circumstances and not that of essence. She explains that the "Indian view, the force that sustains the world is a conscious will. Nature is it's executive power and matter is but one of the possible field, *Kshetra*, of a consciousness hidden within it, across it and beyond it". Ronald S. Lello expressed the nature of Wealth and Well-being in the context of the search for human liberation, reflecting upon the seperateness of wealth and well-being from that of sacred and what might connect them and how the dismal study of economics still remains available for this purpose. Peter Abbs paper, Art to Recover Soul stressed the need for new metaphysical art.

Amidst the slide shows and verses from Mirza Ghalib, Ameena Ahmed Ahuja gave a beautiful presentation of her work 'Art into Calligraphy', bringing forth the sacredness of our ancient tombs and monuments which have withstood the test of time preserving the tradition of sacredness of that era. Also the slide presentation of Shobha Broota and K. Khosa spoke volumes of sacredness through the different hues of their paintings. Santosh Pall's presentation on the works of W.B. Yeats evoked multiple discussions among the participants. Towards the end Shantum Seth delivered his presentation on 'Bamboo', which stirred up many views and comments on the use and quality of longevity and continuity of bamboo. This gave way to an open discussion, initiated by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan. While summing up the proceedings she commented upon Shantum Seth's presentation as a journey of a generation, ".... because this journey brought up another part of Indian history of a kind, that is movement of *khadi* which came up from Gandhiji's vision – the symbol of National struggle". She spoke about the two viewpoints, "pull towards standardization of everything from matter to spirit and pushing of the organic growth and

renewal cycle of which bamboo becomes so central at the conceptual level because it is self renewing. Thus becoming a symbol of new vision and of sustainable development model".

Dr. Kathleen Raine, in her concluding remark ventured upon various levels of presentations exchanged through dialogues during the Conference. Emphasising the need and use of education in every practical aspect of life, "practical outcome of our inner realisation of who we are and what we are". She said that the young people in England have recognised the practical use of the land and are returning back to nature. They are giving a great deal in terms of saving the trees, animals and the ecological balance.

Thus the four days Conference on the Voice Of The Sacred In Our Time concluded, throwing many insights for us to delve into. But the inner voice of the sacred of our consciousness remains and can still be heard only if we listen carefully to it. As Dr. Kathleen Raine rightfully said, "the sacred is knowledge, it is not a vague idea, it is not an illusion and it is not a feeling. It is a traditional source of universe itself. From the foundation of the universe there has been a reality of nature and man".

It is now up to us to decide, whether to let materialism sweep away this sacred knowledge or to preserve and strengthen it like the 'renewal cycle of the Bamboo'.

Richa Negi

Delegates of the Conference

