

30TH LALA LAJPATRAI MEMORIAL LECTURE

THE WRITER AND SOCIETY

AROON TIKEKAR



LALA LAJPATRAI COLLEGE
OF COMMERCE & ECONOMICS
(SPONSORED BY LALA LAJPATRAI INSTITUTE)

The Authorities of this college have done me a rare honour by inviting me to deliver the 30th Lala Lajpatrai Memorial Lecture in the series of lectures that have been instituted to keep the memory green of one of the greatest sons of modern India, better known to history as the Lion of Punjab. A leader of genuine Indian vintage, Lala Lajpatrai shared Lokmanya Tilak's political philosophy of '*shatham prati shaathyam*', that is 'tit for tat'. It was the triumvirate, 'Lal-Bal-Pal', through their thoughts, words, and deeds that ultimately paved the way for the later date mass upsurge under Mahatma Gandhi which brought freedom to the country. Lala Lajpatrai was a prolific writer whose political and economic writings were so logical and so very appealing that even the British rulers found it difficult to refute them. He was a suave journalist who wielded his mighty pen to rouse the nationalistic feelings of hundreds and thousands of his fellow-countrymen against the oppression and repression of the alien rulers and also a consummate orator whose words could even pierce the most impregnable hearts among his listeners. The college bears the name of such a leader of leaders and this lecture series also is instituted in his memory.

Standing before you, members of the Faculty, my erstwhile colleagues, and *alumni*, as a speaker in the series, I have a queer feeling. Three decades ago, I was one of the organisers of these lectures instituted for paying our humble tribute to the great leader. My role then was limited only to thanks-giving and occasionally introducing the speaker. Since then much water has flown under the bridge. After obtaining my masters, when I had opted for a teaching career, after a couple of hops, I was fortunate to be selected to teach in the homely atmosphere of this then newly established college. Over the years the college has grown both in size and prestige, while I, in a weak moment, did opt for a non-teaching vocation and by doing so, perhaps, exchanged mental pleasure for material gains. My years in this college were some of the happiest years of my chequered

career. I would have loved to come back to this college as a teacher as it would have made me feel young again. But Principal Dr. Shirhatti has dug out from the college archives my birth-date and, to remind me of that date, he has arranged a felicitation so as to make sure that I do not revert to this noble profession. I must confess that I am simply overwhelmed by his kind gesture. I am honoured further by the presence of professor J.V. Naik, eminent historian and my elderly friend whom I have known for more than two decades, and who is presiding over today's lecture. I have always admired his erudition as well as his human qualities. If I could have got the benefit of being his student, I would have been an altogether different personality. I am further indebted by his acceptance of the invitation to preside over this lecture. I have no words to thank him sufficiently.

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I intend elucidating the social function of the writer and why the present day writers, with a few bright exceptions, are shying away from that useful role.

Why does a writer write? It is for pleasure, to give vent to the inner urge, to calm down a disturbed mind—so would perhaps a poet, a novelist or a playwright say. Such sentiments are typical and may be perfectly sound in a way. But then why does the writer publish his or her creations? Any human being and that *includes the writer, has every right to aspire for earning name and fame*. There is nothing wrong in such a legitimate ambition of which any decent person need be ashamed. G.H. Hardy, in his **A Mathematician's Apology** writes about three laudable motives which may lead men to prosecute research. These may very well be applicable to the writer as well. These, according to him, are: the first, intellectual curiosity, a desire to know the truth; the second, professional pride, anxiety to be satisfied with one's performance, the shame that overcomes any self-respecting craftsman when his work is unworthy of his talents, and, finally, ambition, desire for reputation, and the position, even

the power or the money, which it brings. Creating a work of literary art is one thing and publishing it is quite another. Publishing a poem, or a novel, or a play has a motive other than just honouring one's obligation to oneself and cannot be deemed unnatural. Yet the fact remains that publishing a work of literature in a book form or for that matter any other form, gives it another dimension that refutes the writer's argument that he writes purely to please himself.

There are of course, writers who do subscribe to the 'pleasing oneself' theory. T.S. Eliot, the English poet and critic, who has much theorised his role as a poet, undoubtedly will pass as the leader of such writers. Some writers may extend the self-drawn limitation to confessing that they write for other writers or/and those closer to them. In fact, Eliot, is on record when he said, "The more serious authors have a limited, and even provincial audience, and the more popular write for an illiterate and uncritical mob". Eliot's ungenerous remark about the popular writing might have been out of hostile reactions to his own writings by the contemporary common readers. But what, perhaps, he really meant was that the more popular writer addresses a mass audience largely innocent of literary training and without critical standards.

Thus it is obvious that when a writer prepares a literary work for publishing, there is always an additional motive in mind than just pleasing oneself. It is true that many a time the writer attempts to write for an audience limited to one's own admirers; it is also true that on other occasions one writes for the audience one does not know and at whose sensibilities one can only guess. By and large, novelists and short story writers write for a hypothetical popular audience.

For the writer who makes a living out of the profession of his writing, this, perhaps, is an essential condition. This leads us to the other question: Is there any relation of the writer with the

society around him? If there is one, then what is that relation? Are the writers, due to the nature of their work, alienated from the society? Or is it sufficient for a modern-day writer to be a Narcissus of sorts?

If it is accepted that a writer writes and publishes his work for 'communicating' or 'connecting' with members of the society in which he/she lives, the argument further leads us to yet another question: does the writer who writes for the society around him have any social function? In other words, does he as a member of the 'privileged' class have any social responsibility?

In a culture which possesses a true spiritual unity – or even a unity in diversity for that matter – men and women are united or divided emotionally or otherwise, but share a common dream, the writer who remains aloof, standing on a slightly raised platform, could afford to be solitary and cultivate his thoughts from his innermost self, for he could take for granted that on larger issues he is united with those around him and so could go on to explore his own individuality through the characters he attempts to portray in his literary creation. There could also be a situation when the common dream has been dissipated, and the world of objective sanctions and values has been lost. Then the writer is forced to find his own unity with his own people through some abstract system consciously worked out and create his subjective, collective as well as individual values. Cleanth Brooks in his Kerr Memorial Lecture of 1965 on **'The writer and his community'** sums up the argument of his oration: 'How else can a writer function? With dozens of problems of selection and emphasis and articulating to make on every page that he writes, he cannot be always looking back over his shoulder to try to catch the changing expressions on the faces of a hypothetical public.'

A writer cannot 'create' a literary work in a vacuum. No doubt, he should be endowed with two qualities, viz. creativity and craftsmanship. His 'creativity' and 'craftsmanship' are the result of his understanding of the 'tradition' of the society around him and his individual talent'. Whether his literary creation is 'an emotion recollected in tranquillity', as Wordsworth described a poetic expression or 'a heated caprice of an agitated mind', as a novel can be described, both the inner forces drive a writer while he is involved in the literary activity. Just as 'what is said' is important, 'how it is said' is also equally important. 'What is said' depends on the ability of the writer who temporarily assumes the role of a creator, by supplanting the life experience in his world of imagination, while 'how he says it' depends largely on his craftsmanship, a quality which he has acquired. If he is a gifted writer, creativity would come to him naturally, while his endeavour to communicate with others effectively would depend on the level of acquired technique in craftsmanship. Even his creativity is a combination of his understanding of the 'tradition' he inherits, consciously or otherwise, and the 'individual talent' that he has acquired through his study of Man and Nature. Like T.S. Eliot, many have tried to define 'tradition'. A literary work, creative or discursive, is, thus in the ultimate analysis, a comment on the contemporary society and as such the writer is a social critic. Creative writer too in this sense is a social critic and this precisely is the social function of a writer.

All literature, in a sense, is contemporary literature just as 'all history is contemporary history'. Tradition plays an important role in a creative work, in prose as well as poetry. In discursive prose it does so prominently. Tradition, by definition is partly constant, and, therefore, unchanging, but partly changing. By making use of the knowledge of the society of the past inherited over generations to which the writer belongs, the writer assumes the role of a conscience keeper of the society. His constant evaluation and re-evaluation of the tradition he inherits, makes

him a preserver of old values and also the creator of new ones. In the process, he becomes the principal agent of social change. It must be remembered that there is nothing sacrosanct about tradition i.e., social mores, conventions and customs. 'Conventionality is not morality', so very tellingly expressed by Charlotte Bronte in her classic work **Jane Eyre**. The only exception is the basic human values such as compassion (*Daya*), Forgiveness (*Kshama*), universal peace (*Shanti*), truth (*Satya*). Apart from these the conscience of the writer, like other human beings, is not constant, it grows with every new enlightenment. New values based on the newer concepts of equality and social justice which tend to remove the invidious distinction between man and man, man and woman, are created and the creative writer is, and has always been, sensitive to such changes, especially to the concepts and ideas relating to social justice in the widest sense of the term, and also those dealing with science, religion and philosophy. As a socio-cultural leader of the society, it becomes, therefore, the prime responsibility of the writer to keep these human values alive by constantly bringing them before his readers. He needs to assure that any kind of discrimination on account of caste, creed, race or colour is an affront to human dignity and crime against humanity at large. Equality, especially in economic sphere, could at best be considered to be a romantic idea, hard to put in practice, but not so the equality of opportunity. However, the writer must go in for achieving his goal, at least in the imaginary world of literary creation. He must prepare his readers to discard what is irrational, irrelevant and dead in the old and accept new values applying the criteria of reason and social comfort. For, social good presupposes a living, changing society. If he is a consummate artist and a thinker himself he may become a forerunner of shape of things to come. The larger the area of his influence, the better it is for society. It is a proven historical fact that the intellectual revolution precedes the material revolution. Emerson had said that 'every reform was once a

private opinion'. An idea takes its birth in somebody's fertile brain and when it is diligently delivered, grows into a movement. This I believe, is the process of creating new values. The writer who is a hero unto himself thus tends to be a role-model for many.

The ideal writer does not belong to any particular class. He is detached and stands aloof from the rest of the society, by choice, not by compulsion. He, for his own professional reasons' prefers to be the 'outsider', 'a spectator'. He of course, cannot be a total stranger in his social milieu. He could at best be termed an insider 'outsider'. He prefers to be left alone but is definitely not lonely. Why, one may ask ? A social critic, of necessity, is an intellectual recluse. To discharge his duties effectively he has to maintain a critical distance from the society around him. While the extent of that 'critical distance' is debatable, the need for objectivity is indisputable. John Fowles, American novelist and essayist, in his recent collection of essays, **Wormholes**, has discussed about his inspiration to write. He goes to the extent of saying that 'he writes therefore he is'. In an essay titled, **'I write therefore I am,'** he says that his avowed ambition has always been to alter the society he lives in: " Society, existing among other human beings challenges me, so I have to choose my weapon. I choose writing; but the thing that comes first is that I am challenged". Fowles' views could be those of any writer who today takes to writing professionally. Fowles feels that the writer has three politico-social obligations. The first, he has to be an atheist. The second, not to belong to any political party. And the third, not to belong to any bloc, organisation, group, clique or school. As he says, 'the first because even if there is God, it is safer for human mind to act on the assumption that there is not (the famous Pascalian *Pari* in reverse); and the second and the third, because individual freedom is in danger, and as much in the West as in the East. The virtue of the West is not that it is easier to be free here, but that if one is free one

doesn't have to pretend, as one behind the Iron Curtain that one is not.'

The writer, unlike the politician, is not in for a popularity contest. The politician has to remain an insider and play his game generally to the galleries. Such is not the case with the writer who has to be true to himself and to the society too. The writer is supposed to set standards and even create utopias in the hope that they will be realities in not too distant a future. All human progress is in pursuit of utopias. The socially conscious writer has to be the spokesman of the nameless, faceless, voiceless, who are generally covered by the Gramscian term 'subaltern'.

Ideally every work of literary art to be effective should be a carefully crafted provocative polemic. It must stir the reader's head as well as his heart, that is, both reason and emotion and in some extreme unbearable situation, it must earnestly harness the horses of reason and unchain the tiger of emotion leading to revolutionary social change. In the case of the French Revolution, it was Voltaire who harnessed horses of reason and Rousseau who unchained the tiger of emotion. It is the duty of the writer, therefore, to give expression to the discontent or otherwise that lays latent in the hearts and the minds of the community.

That the literary life in our society in the post-Independence period has considerably languished cannot be denied. And it has happened despite the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution. This constitutional guarantee offers the exemplary freedom to writers, journalists and artists *et al.* Fortunately, there were no serious attempts during the last five decades when there was secession or suspension of these rights, with the sole exception of the days of Internal Emergency (1975-77), an occasion when the writers' freedom of expression was

sought to be curtailed much to the chagrin of the thinking people. The general experience then was that not many writers struggled or fought to protect their fundamental right and preferred not to come out of their cocoon to protest. Why were they so timid as not to displease the authorities? The reasons are numerous and varied, but not difficult to enumerate.

The first and foremost reason of the writer's complacency or the timidity as the case may be, is to be found in the decay of the democratic set up. Causes of the deterioration of the young democracy in India are far too many, the foremost being the degeneration of political life. Numerous political parties, whatever be their professed objectives, have, in a short while learnt to thrive on corruption and hypocrisy. There is a total absence of stable relationships among them. Also there is no consensus among them on basic national issues, though leaders of every political party appear to be chanting the mantra of 'social justice'. Stable relationships among the political parties and common minimum agenda on national issues are the prerequisites for any healthy democracy. Corruption has also thrived on the fact that the political parties irrespective of differences in colour of their flags, are guilty of the same hidden ulterior motives. The objectives of these parties many a time do not even include the goal of capturing power, whereas attainment of power should be the goal of every political party worth the name.

Highly personalised politics has become increasingly a baneful feature of the Indian democracy. In an attempt to concentrate total and absolute power, Indira Gandhi, in whose Prime Ministerial years the freedom of expression was sought to be curtailed, unfortunately hastened the decay of political institutions which led to the decline of constitutional authority and public morality which in turn laid the foundation of criminalization of politics. Political decay inevitably leads to

cultural decay. In the absence of many avenues open for upward social mobility for its citizens, 'politics' in any democratic set up becomes a 'gainful' full time profession. If an individual avows personal loyalty to a successful and powerful political leader, his or her political career is guaranteed, at least for the time being. Politics in India has become a profession which has no stakes but which has all the chances of abundant windfalls. It has become a profession that allows, protects and ensures power, which is a key to personal economic development. Once personal loyalty is given an overriding preference over political and other ideologies, political power is attainable through patronage, money and muscle strength. Success gained through political power breeds more such successes which further lead to more political power. This power not only corrupts but also intoxicates. Such corruption and intoxication further make it necessary to resort to criminal tactics for its retention. In such a situation the common man is a helpless victim. A writer is expected to oppose these wrong-doings. If he tamely abdicates his responsibility to the society, ceasing to perform his social function, then he is a traitor to his calling.

In such a situation democratic principles degenerate into mobocratic tendencies. Will Durant had rightly remarked that 'Democracy without education means hypocrisy without limitation'. Failure to contain population explosion, failure to educate the masses, improper proprieties and incorrect strategies of social welfare have resulted in ever-sliding quality of our socio-cultural life where over half of the population lives in sub-human conditions and is deprived of the fundamental rights of citizens that are guaranteed by our Constitution. The masses with their characteristic native wisdom, have not taken long to discover the hollowness in the words of journalists and writers, and in the platitudes in the speeches by our politicians.

Our democracy, which has virtually turned into mobocracy, has thus tended to make uniformity a surrogate for equality in the name of social justice. At the same time by reducing traditional social inequalities that had crept in the ancient social structure and by destroying idiosyncratic, arbitrary and exclusive elements, our democracy has helped clear the way for the forces of the market. Misguided masses have become the principal support of our national polity. It is the rabble that decide everything. 'This is what the people want', is the standard refrain of the marketing agents. Everything has become a market-product and to sell it requires a marketing strategy, be it a soap or a literary work. Leadership appears to have lost its character and enlightened vision and the will to lead. There appears to be a need for appropriate leadership empowerment. Democracy the way it is practised in our country seems to minimise the obligation to lead. The demagogues who instigate the ignorant masses are catapulted into power by popular prejudices and, as seen recently, by hatred. It has been rightly observed by the Russian author Anton Chekov that it is the hatred of something rather than love, respect or friendship that unites people more. And one of the lessons of History is that 'you can't crown ignorance because there is too much of it.'

I, Robert Sinai, in an essay **What Ails Us & Why**, had aptly summed up this situation when democracy minimises its obligation to lead. He had said, "It raises to power those who are ready to be subservient to the unexamined prejudices and preferences of the multitudes and to the practitioners of 'permissive exploitation'. Democracy thus offers an opening, if not an invitation, for men to such power merely for its prestige and its material rewards and not for the capacity or the will to take a part in historical existence. The men who attain power are neither able nor willing to change thoughts and values, or to play lofty historical roles, but are merely satisfied to subordinate themselves to the ignorant and pliable mass".

When the political authority is thus weakened, the writers should come forward and assume intellectual leadership to bring about the desired social and cultural change. But that is not seen happening in our society today. When political culture declines, affecting the social life, the writer should take up the onerous task of rejuvenating the society, directly or indirectly. This is the social function of the writer. He should lead a silent revolution through his literary works. By expressing dissent and fighting against the corrupt, polluted system, and by suggesting remedial measures he should endeavour to bring about desired change in the social mind, by appealing to the conscience and reason of his readers. It is true that literature has flourished even under despotic regimes. Our writers have, however, never faced despotism in the recent past. Neither have they been subjected to repressive tactics, nor have they experienced war in its full furore. Their experience in this respect is limited only to the two years of censorship during the Internal Emergency in the country when even the repressive apparatus could not operate efficiently, as the ruling bureaucracy was either corrupt or apathetic or simply insolent. Even in this singularly abominable situation our writers did not, rather could not, stand up to the acid test.

To write in plain, vigorous language and make penetrative analysis of the abnormal situation one has to think fearlessly and if one has to think fearlessly one cannot be politically naive. A majority of our writers today prefer to play safe and remain aloof and silent, as if in an equidistant position from all political parties. Equi-distant from all does not mean non-conformist. One does not need to wait for the arrival of a Hitler or a Mussolini or for that matter a Stalin and wake up only after the State apparatus shows its totalitarian nature by resorting to extreme repressive measures. World history is full of instances when the rulers resorted to silencing the voices that protested against the atrocities of the despots. King Khalif Omar, who, after the

capture of Alexandria, was asked to spare the library, is reported to have replied, 'If the books in it are consistent with the Koran, they are superfluous and should be destroyed. If they are inconsistent with the Koran, they are harmful and must be destroyed'. From Khalif Omar's time, and even before that and definitely afterwards, the despots have been the enemies of free thought, belief and expression. Therefore, the writer at all times should remain vigilant about and resist even the impending or unforeseen attack of any sort on the freedom of thought and expression. In modern times, even a mass society that humbles men in authority can play the same role. 'A society becomes totalitarian', says Orwell 'when its structure becomes flagrantly artificial, that is, when its ruling class has lost its function but succeeds in clinging to power by force or fraud. Such a society, no matter how long it persists, can never afford to become tolerant or intellectually stable'. Are we, in India, far behind this situation, one may ask.

Few will have any dispute with Orwell's assertion that, 'there is no such thing as genuinely non-political literature, when fears, hatred and loyalties of a directly political kind are near to the surface of everyone's consciousness'. No writer, true to the integrity of his vocation, can really remain aloof from political happenings. He cannot keep away from controversial topics. For, 'Even a single taboo' according to Orwell, 'can have an all-round crippling effect upon the mind because there is always the danger of any thought which is freely followed up may lead to the forbidden thought', in a totalitarian regime.

The writer in India today is still ignorant and perhaps even innocent about the kind of inhuman acts and cruelties to which a despot could resort to. For, he has no first hand experience of it. The European and Russian psyche knows it too well as it has undergone the horrifying experiences. Our writers have generally shunned politics, especially after the Independence there are

no thinker writers who are either political activists or who run non-governmental movements. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political thinker, faced imprisonment; Marc Blockh, the French historian, of the Annales School was arrested, imprisoned, in the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, and harassed and ruthlessly shot by the Nazis from a point-blank range; Anna Akhmatova, the Russian poetess, was not allowed to publish her poems in her life-time. It is their defiance of totalitarian regimes that have essentially made the writers like Sartre, Camus, Orwell and Arthur Koestler all time greats. It is such Western thinker writers who stood firm to their ideals in the face of overwhelming odds that stimulated a spirit of critical inquiry in all aspects of human life and gave rise to the thought process that shaped the European mind which generated rational-liberal ideas and which to a large degree account for the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany or the disintegration of the Soviet union. This is not to suggest that what is happening in Europe today is ideal or wholly conducive to human welfare at large. Admittedly, self-enlightened interest has been, and will remain broadly a guiding principle in all human affairs. The point which is sought to be made here is that the creative thinkers and writers are expected to respond to the challenges to basic human dignity and rights and thus play a crucial role in shaping the minds and thoughts of the rulers and ruled alike, especially in a democratic set up. Such efforts are unfortunately conspicuous by their absence in our country as compared to those in the West.

How the European writers zealously guard their hard earned intellectual freedom, like a cobra would guard hidden wealth, is exemplified by the protest led by the of the international writers association, the PEN, against the German Government's proposed law to ban pornographic literature in the late 1940's. Erich Kastner, a respected author of the Weimar generation, had then reminded his countrymen that similar legislation in the

1920's had made unsophisticated people suspicious of literature and had thus prepared the way for Hitler's book-burning and exhibitions of the 'degenerate art'. Kastner had described this law as 'a new Trojan horse'.

By and large our writers seem to be assuming that mass society has no place for free thinkers and creative personalities, nor has it any desire for independence and originality and that it is despising a sane voice in the clamor for personal economic gains. They feel that if they do not fall in line, they will not be heard. If the writer falls in line and becomes, so to say, pro-establishment in everything that he does or, at least, observes convenient silence during controversies he may be allowed to be, like many others, a partaker of government largesse and other material advantages. This is an attitude no less selfish than an argument that it is the duty of the government in democracy to support its writers and artists, in the absence yester year Kings and Princes. Just as in a democracy it would not be wise to stay away from governmental machinery, it would be equally a mistake to award it the role of a patron. The price that the writer is paying in such a situation is a convenient silence, under the pretext of the 'critical distance' from the society and its government, so very essential for the writer. Government patronage in the form of awards, subsidised housing, memberships of various committees and such other benefits has, in a relatively infant democracy like ours, an anaesthetic effect that is keeping writers in a perpetual state of coma and they, willingly or unwillingly, more willingly than otherwise, are seen succumbing to these petty temptations.

There are many other reasons for keeping the writer away from carrying out his social responsibility. Mass literacy seems to have rather lowered than raised general level of culture and understanding. Obviously the majority of people who have learnt to read and write during the past fifty years have not received

the kind of education which atleast brings social awareness, if not enlightenment. The vast expansion of the so-called higher education also instead of raising, has led to a catastrophic lowering of academic standards: An attempt to achieve universal literacy is laudable. But should those who formulated and implemented educational policies and the recipients of such education take pride in the current situation? What is passing for scholarship today is only an adjunct of power. The genuine teachers, scholars and intellectuals capable of disseminating knowledge have become redundant and the idea-mongers whose principal talent consists in their ability to play to the galleries have become respectable and popular. Obsessed by their search for worldly success and desire to win popular applause, our modern day social critics have generally degraded learning and thus betrayed the high calling of independent thinking. The disorientation of society, the indiscriminate expansion of mass-media, the aimless growth of higher education have all contributed to the dilution of the quality of intellectual life in India. With a few honorable exceptions the performance of our intellectuals and writers has been generally characterised by cowardice, opportunism, intellectual dishonesty and irresponsibility. This tentamounts to self-deception.

The courage to question seriously the majority opinion on well reasoned grounds in his literary creation constitutes the distinguishing mark of the social critic. Unfortunately he, like the politician, is driven by the 'correct' marketing strategy and does not want to be on the 'wrong' side. The present-day critic seems to have almost forgotten that freedom of expression actually means freedom to oppose, to criticise what he thinks wrong. He appears to have relinquished his role of swimming against the current. Instead of the writer moulding the opinion of readers and creating new values for their consideration and acceptance, he finds it safe to uphold old value structure, and is resisting change which is a short step to obscurantism.

The writer's lack of the courage of his conviction to lead his readers rather than be led by them has inevitably resulted in his almost conscious efforts not to offend the powers that be. He has forsaken his role of a social critic and prefers to maintain an ominous and, one may say, even religious silence about literary merit or otherwise of a controversial book or of a socio-political issue. On such matters he tends to be non-committal, a position that guarantees him safety. Such an impotent critic is however quick to defend his cronies. This smacks of narrow unethical groupism devoid of any altruistic intent. Such writers readily take up their pens when their own caste or community affinity, geographical affinity, group affinity, is threatened. Even on issues concerning the freedom of expression, they prefer to remain silent for fear of offending the political leaders. If a professional colleague is under surveillance or is harassed by the police for 'heretic' writings, and if he does not belong to their group or caste, they tend to ignore or dismiss the issue on the pretext that it is his 'personal' problem. Our present-day writers do not see that any attack on intellectual liberty and on the concept of truth, threatens in the long run every department of thought and, therefore, the freedom of thought should be zealously guarded. The writer's convenient posture so as not to incur the displeasure of the powerful politicians, is bad enough. But his abdicating his role of a social critic is far worse. The writer today does not enjoy sound reputation as he did in the past, because he has willy-nilly surrendered his moral authority.

Few can today make writing a full-time profession as it cannot provide for a reasonably decent living. The bookmarket in India has not grown as it should have been precisely for the reasons cited above. Since most of the writers in India today are comparatively well-paid teachers, they do enjoy, under the garb of academic freedom, a certain amount freedom of expression. They, however, restrict their radical views to the precincts of their respective institutions. On the other hand, they

remain studiously silent on public platforms for fear of incurring wrath of the powers that be. In literature of many modern Indian languages including Marathi, any significant remark or statement made by a worthy or unworthy writer, goes generally unchecked, unchallenged and unregistered. There are no serious debates on any issue. This is a sure index of the writers' abdication of their social responsibility.

The moral authority of the writer gives him strength to lead even the lay readers. Once that authority is forsaken no one would look up to him to say – 'Lead, Kindly Light'. In a rational-secular age, when God is conceived as Truth and moral and ethical code, newer norms of social ethics come into being to regulate the human life. The story of man has essentially been an eternal quest for an equitable and just society.

Apparently there are two different kinds of morality – private morality and public morality i.e. morality in private life and morality in public sphere. In fact both are the two sides of the same coin, the one cannot flourish without the other. Every new generation of the society provides for its members new standards of virtuous character, value based performance, just social arrangements – which are generally called relationships, such as father and son, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, husband and wife, teacher and student, brother and sister, brother and brother, sister and sister, employee and employer, friend and friend and so on. In all their forms, they are subject to interpretation. The social critic in the writer is expected to do everything on high principle of human good. He has to be humane, democratic and secular and should be in a position to offer a rational explanation for the causes he takes up. Every society, at whatever stage of progress it is, shares some common principles, at least in theory. Morality is one of them. Norms of Morality, though not among the basic human values, have been ever changing, in response to new socio-

economic dictates. Writers, including artists, are to a large extent, responsible for preparing the people to accept the changes for social good. There are some things relating to change that can be argued and debated. Since the writer or his fellow professional is instrumental, to a degree, in effecting such a change, he is *expected to participate in the debate and stoutly defend the ideas* he stands for. He has to enunciate and propagate some kind of value structure without indulging in propaganda. Such polemics is the part of the writer's profession. The tragedy is that this is exactly what he is shunning away from.

Popular ethos and social pressures in a mass society is almost enslaving the weak writer among others. Market forces and often rabid public opinion are seen pressing with enormous weight upon the mind of the individual including the writer and that has weakened him. When human beings grow alike, they not only lose individuality but also each one of them feels feeble than all the rest. Made uniform by all the vast collective forces of the modern world the average individual becomes more feeble, and even more narrow-minded, begoted and dependent. The writer is no exception to this general rule. Candour and independence of opinion which constitute an outstanding feature of the writer's profession are rarely to be seen today. It is this candour and independence of opinion that often makes him sound ideosyncratic, but his strength is his moral authority. If the writer's liberal outlook is sacrificed at the altar of mass-society then he becomes an agent rather than a solvent of oppression and repression.

Orwell, who had carefully studied such a situation in a totalitarian state, was of the opinion that "poetry might survive in a totalitarian age, and certain arts or half-arts such as architecture, might find even tyranny beneficial, but the prose writer would have no choice between silence and death. Prose literature as we know it is the product of rationalism of the

Protestant centuries of the autonomous individuals. And the destruction of intellectual liberty cripples the journalist, the sociological writer, the historian, the novelist, the critic and the poet in that order. In the future it is possible that a new kind of literature, not involving individual feeling or truthful observation may arise, but no such thing is at present imaginable. It seems much likelier that if the liberal culture that we have lived in since the Renaissance actually comes to an end, the literary art will perish with it."

Orwell, perhaps, tends to overlay his pessimism. In any case, he was discussing the European societies and their cultures. In a multi-religious, multi-cultural nation such as ours, our physical existence will depend upon the continuance of tolerant, liberal and humane spirit of the masses at large. In fact, it could be construed as the social responsibility of the writer to propagate timeless and universal values such as compassion and tolerance. If liberalism in the broadest sense of the term is dead and buried, mass society will run amock and destroy all that is '*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*'. If at all this happens, fanatical 'religious' resurgence will have one more victim to its discredit.
