Editorial

The whole world is trying to come out of the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. All attempts are made to halt it; but its new variants create challenges to global healthcare system. Though fast development of vaccines proved to be a great consolation to the mankind. The unforgettable second wave came with great lessons. It defeated all shades of materialism and life of opulence. It shaped a new perception to see life. One sided view of life came to an end. What was ignored and sidelined due to unspiritual outlook that got importance. People realised that even in the so called ultra-modern age material pleasure is not everything.

Concurrently a 'man-made' war rubbed salt into the wounds of pandemic-stricken world. Miseries in their new forms have enveloped the earth. Perplexities are at their brim. Humanity is in crisis. Both the natural and man-made crises have brought massive economic upheavals. No substantial improvement is seen. A world of refugees created in recent decades due to wars keeps on increasing its size. From all corners, a prayer for safety and security of life has become a major concern. The worst agonies and torments of the victims need special attention of creative writers for the sake of coming generations to learn lessons from them.

It is true that indifference to other's suffering is a human nature as W. H. Auden illustrates in his poem, "Musee des Beaux Arts":

> In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
> Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
> Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
> But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
> As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
> Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
> Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
> Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on. (14-21)

But there is something that strikes the artists and plays the bonding role between humanity and art. Therefore, art has a humanizing force inherent in it.

During the World Wars, many poets came to the fore and wrote remarkable poems in human history. One of them is "Dulce et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen. When propaganda machines become more active during wars, this poem is truly notable, particularly for those who think that war is always fought for national security. The four ending lines of the poem need special mention here:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori. (25-28)

Today, nationalism has come to its worst stage globally. It is not that of Tagore as he mentioned in his book *Nationalism* (1917) in which 'morality', 'brotherhood' and 'adjustment' are of paramount importance. The mask of religion has made modern nationalism more dangerous in the long run. It makes mockery of modern science, technology, discovery, and intellectualism, and promulgates fanaticism. It should be remembered that fanaticism takes more lives than any war. Histories are full of such evidence.

Peace lovers and activists are already doing their parts to remind us our holy duty to strengthen love, fraternity, acceptance, and all other core values in us for establishing peace on earth. There are three books worth reading on the similar subjects co-edited by me in recent years: *Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery: IFLAC Anthology* (2021), *Anti-War and Peace: IFLAC Anthology* (2018), and *Anti-Terror and Peace: IFLAC Anthology* (2016).

Literary writers too are expected to reflect the happenings of modern times in their works as a balm on the wounded hearts.

I hope the readers will enjoy reading the articles, poems and book review published in this issue of *Akshara*. Valuable comments are solicited.

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