

## **ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

### **NILMANI PHOOKAN**

I feel honoured to be selected as a Fellow by Sahitya Akademi. Further, I thank the Akademi for conferring such an honour on an Assamese poet like me. In the midst of numerous limitations, during the last forty-five years I have devoted myself to the pursuit of art and literature with utmost sincerity. I consider this award to be a literary and social recognition of this modest endeavour of mine.

I would like to repeat Jaroslav Seifert's poetic words and say—I have only added a few poems to the several million poems of the world. There is no deeper wisdom in them than the sound of crickets. I know you will forgive me.

Like many other Indian writers, the days of childhood and youth spent in some unknown village is the spring and base soil of my life as a writer. In the village itself knowingly or unknowingly I struck a perceptive relationship with nature, life and reality, and slowly it blossomed into an awakening of life, thought and sorrow.

After having spent fifty long years in the city, even today it is the village itself that is my memory, dream, grief, happiness and countless other things—melody, smell, colour and glimpses of the mystery of day and night; it has constantly stirred my mind, heart and imagination.

Standing at the edge or the middle of the village, on the bank of the river of winter or rain that flows by, even today I seem to gaze at the horizon all around, at the birds that fly away at the onset of dusk. I stretch my hands up to the towering trees. Crossing the rivers and oceans, the forests, hills, mountains and the deserts—this man from some place goes and appears in some remote distance. Assuming them to be friends of some past life, I embrace them one after the other. I become oblivious of my own self and find myself anew. I have become the partaker of the boundless energy, hopes and

aspirations, the pride, joy, shame, affliction, of triumph and loss of the eternal man. When man exists in totality, inanimate and animate objects are there—when there is fire and water, the sun, moon and stars of laughter and tears keep burning through eternity in the same sky.

If the village disappears from creative imagination, the beautiful and glorious rainbow of our art and literature would also fade away. Passing through unaccountable want and poverty for thousands of years, our villages have kept our Indian languages flowing and exuberant. If the villages are not freed from the clutches of exploitation, poverty, caste differences, religious enmity and fanaticism, ethnic clashes and globalization, from where would the languages and literatures of the Indian writers draw their nectar of life? The age-old prosperous oral tradition of Indian literature and culture would turn into a dead stream.

C.G. Jung had once remarked—modern man is searching for a soul. We believe it is through poetry that one day he would find that soul. He would find a clue to a world of love, new spiritual value and a human era in its totality.

Worship of the indivisible life itself is the supplication of the poet. In poetry, love, strength, peace, unity, beauty and creativity man has immense faith. That is the reason why it is imperishable and eternal. Each poem is a human moment, moment of inexpressible joy and sorrow, the joy and sorrow which culminates in a silent regeneration of awareness.

Since time immemorial poetry had been reverberating with its sound in the deep recesses of mortal humans. Wherever there is man, there is poetry, there are living objects, and even the inanimate world comes to life.

Poetry is the voice of humanity. Whenever one tries to listen, each person can hear in the quietness of his own mind the flowing cadence of dawn and dusk, of truth and beauty.