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Pilingrinnaragge

of peace

Sri Chinmoy began his pilgrimage of peace 16 years ago, in the United Nations. It has taken him to the far corners of the globe capturing the imagination of countless thousands.

By David Burke

The search for peace has inspired statesmen and saints alike from the beginning of recorded time. In our modern age, one of the most remarkable odysseys for peace is that being undertaken by the 54-year-old Bengali spiritual master, poet, artist and composer, Sri Chinmoy.

This pilgrimage of music and silence began 16 years ago, in the august halls of the United Nations. Over the years, it has taken him to the far corners of the globe, capturing the imagination of countless thousands with its profound simplicity and sincerity. It's a journey that will probably continue the rest of his life.

"Each one of us represents the world," he says. "If we can invoke peace and then offer it to others, we will see how peace expands from one to two persons, and gradually to the world at large."

Sri Chinmoy began working on this chain reaction in the spring of 1970, when he initiated his twice-weekly peace meditations at the United Nations for the delegates and staff members there. Two years ago he inaugurated his peace meditations at the U.S. Congress in Washington, in a ceremony attended by about 100 Congressmen and visitors.

Shortly afterwards, he broadened his efforts with a global series of one-man

peace concerts. The first concert, held in the spring of 1984, filled the huge Sportshalle in Cologne, Germany, to overflow capacity. Subsequent peace concerts were held in Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Toronto, Tokyo and some 60 other locations. Many others are planned.

Unusual

What's so unusual about these peace concerts, always offered without charge, is their peculiarly Indian flavour: The ambience of prayerful silence and haunting, soulful music that would not be expected to appeal to modern-day Westerners.

Typical was the concert held recently in Washington. The slender spiritual teacher, clad in an ochre dhoti and kurta, walked slowly on to the giant stage. As he stood with folded hands, his eyes rolled up in a meditative trance, a respectful hush settled over the crowd. For several moments, the spacious hall in the middle of one of the world's most sophisticated cities seemed transformed into a holy shrine on the banks of the Ganga.

The stage was filled with various instruments, symbolising the diversity of mankind. As Sri Chinmoy played his special music on them one by one, different segments of humanity seemed to speak through him, expressing their own yearning for peace, the cry for peace gradually built to a crescendo, reverberating through the concert hall, and far beyond.

In that same concert hall, where this lone Indian teacher played his music of the spirit, the answer to that cry also took birth. It grew out of the atmosphere of peace that he created through his meditation and developed a life of its own, leaving its imprint on each person in the audience. For the few fleeting hours the concert lasted, the peace that mankind so desperately sought had become a tangible reality.

Mystical

Sri Chinmoy is ideally suited for his mission of peace. Born in a small village in Chittagong, in what is now Bangladesh, he entered the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry when he was hardly 12, and spent 20 years there in prayer and meditation. During this period he developed the ability to enter into a mystical trance and, in deep communion with the Self, to create an atmosphere of peace that stills the mind and elevates the spirit. He went to the US in 1964.

The power and charisma of this Indian master's meditation has often been remarked upon. P V Narasimha Rao, Minister for Human Resources, after attending one of his UN peace meditations a few years ago, was moved to declare: "I feel transformed ... I had not realised that somewhere tucked away in this very large building of the United Nations there is a small corner where real peace dwells."

President Giani Zail Singh, who met

and meditated privately with Sri Chinmoy during his 1982 visit to New York, said: "Your prayers to God give greatest strength to me... I cannot forget them."

In recent years Sri Chinmoy has been carrying his work for peace beyond concert and meditation halls into the world of art. He has written more than 700 books of spiritual philosophy and poetry and completed more than 140,000 mystical paintings, seeking to create through the medium of art the tranquility and harmony of meditation.

He has also composed some 6,000 Bengali and English devotional songs whose evocative, other-worldly melodies have inundated the hearts of countless listeners with a sense of the Beyond.

Although his meditation-peace concerts may not be producing any immediate noticeable result, they are serving as a spiritual focus for peace movements around the globe and creating a deeper awareness among governments of the tremendous groundswell for peace.

More significant, they stand as the harbinger of a new mode of dealing with conflict, presaging the time when human consciousness will evolve to the point where spiritual power will indeed replace military power in international affairs.

"From time immemorial," Sri Chinmoy says, "history has been dealing with tyrants and liberators. Before long, it will have to deal seriously with peace makers." Whether Sri Chinmoy is one of the 20th century's consummate peace makers only time will tell. But regardless, one can only admire this Indian philosopher-saint's odyssey of music and silence to change the face and fate of the world.

Yogi's pilgrimage
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