

High Commissioner's Remarks at the Launch of Murty Classical Library of India

Friday, 27 February 2015

I am absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to host the launch of the Murty Classical Library of India here at India House in London. We are honoured by the presence of the Director of the British Library, Roly Keating, Sheldon Pollock, General Editor of the Library and of course Rohan Murty whose generous gift to Harvard University made this possible.

I believe this library could be the beginning of a great awakening if not renaissance in the appreciation of India's extraordinary literary heritage. Extraordinary, not only in its depth and beauty but its infinite variety of languages and literary form.

By making available in English the great storehouse of Indian literature (12 languages so far) the Library makes a wonderful contribution. It will, I believe, open new insights into the accomplishments of the Indian people in all ages of history.

Perhaps if these works were available in English in the 19th Century, Macaulay may well have had a very different conception of where the balance lay between knowledge accumulated and expressed in Indian languages and that in English at his time. So much for history. We now look forward to these books disseminating a better understanding of India throughout the world and

we are indebted to the Murty and Harvard for making all this possible. Prof. Pollock and Mr. Murty will also be telling us more about the project and therefore, I would like to end here. I am, however, tempted because we were not able to get in time experts who could read from the books in Pali and Persian along with Telugu and the other languages represented in the first five volumes (though such expertise is available not far from here in London!) I will, therefore, take the liberty of quoting from Allasani Peddana, Story of Manu, translated by V. Narayana Rao and an old friend of mine from Jerusalem David Shulman;

This is when Krishnadevaraya, the great ruler of the great Empire in southern India, was holding court:

*“On either side, women with eyes like blue sapphires and faces radiant as the moon
Were fanning him with yak-tail fans.*

Scholars were discussing the fine point of Paninian grammar,

Kanada’s atomistic philosophy, and Badarayana’s metaphysics.

Swords held by fearless warriors cast a dark glow.

Jewels on the crowns of defeated kings were spreading a cool sunlight.

He was wearing the anklet that proved he was

the Best of the Three Warriors, and the jewels that studded it reflected rich
hues on the white cloth he was wearing, covering his crossed legs.*

Seated enthroned in the hall known as “Conquest of the world”,

in the company of learned people,

he was struck by the joy of poetry, so he turned to me

and gently said:

*“They say that out of the seven kinds of children a person might have, *(the footnote clarifies that they are:- A well, a temple, a garden, an actual son, an endowment, and a book).*

the only one that lasts is a poem.

Make a poem for me, Peddanarya,

with words soft as the softest of flowers, the sirisa, and sweet.

We have had, in this very hall, scholars discussing grammar, philosophy, metaphysics quite apart from politics and economics and even some flashing rhetorical swords. All raised points of interest, but when you go through one of these volumes you would agree with Peddana that “the only one that lasts is a poem”

Thank you for giving India and the world something that will last.