GOLDEN FLOWER: A MUSIC EVENT

Saturday, February 18, 2023

Lecture Room-II, India International Centre (Annexe) Delhi

On a bright morning on February 18, 2023, as Delhi welcomed the season of Spring after a somewhat harsh winter, World Buddhist Culture Trust organised a music event "GOLDEN FLOWER" on the occasion of the Managing Trustee, Lama Doboom Tulku's 82nd birthday that was nourishing to the mind and body. Graced by the presence of Ambassador Shashank and his spouse, who lit the ceremonial brass lamp at the India International Centre, Managing Trustee started the event with a few words explaining the intention behind the Trust's project, *1000 Buddha Hall: Doboom Labrang*, an institution based on the Buddhist principle of simplicity and humility, working on the sound ecological motto "Small is beautiful."

Lama Doboom Tulku began by invoking Santideva's classic text *Bodhicaryavatara* where we find the grand Bodhisattva aspiration articulated in these words: "For as long as space exists, and as long as living beings endure, until then may I too remain to dispel the misery of the world." He shared that these words had recently been chanted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he had an audience with him recently. Doboom Labrang, he elaborated, aspires to be a welcoming centre of learning, under whose aegis two seminars have already been organised which saw a dialogue between of scientists and scholars of philosophy, on the interface between science of mind and various philosophical schools, especially Buddhist. These two-day events held at the IIC had provided rich food for thought and reflection with cutting edge conversations. Lama Doboom Tulku also explained the symbolic significance of the Golden Flower. Golden Flower is a concept that enjoys wide popularity in the Far East, with Tibetans using it to refer to "the Golden Flower of Tibet", i.e., Bodhisattva Avalokitesavara and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The morning's musical session then began and it was carefully curated symphony of some of the most beautiful and profound verses from ancient Indian texts and traditions, blended with some of the most accomplished voices. It began with a heartfelt chanting of the *Prajnaparamita-Hrdayam,* or the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom, by eminent singer Vidushi Vidya Rao, who began by dedicating her chanting of this sacred sutra's most powerful lines to all sentient beings currently undergoing the Dukkha of change, of Samsara. She had chanted this same sutra at the Buddha Jayanti Park more than decade ago. In these lines addressed to the Buddha's disciple, Sariputra, Bodhisattva Avalokitesavara expounds on Emptiness as the Perfection of Wisdom, which is "an unsurpassed mantra, an unmatched mantra, the subduer of all suffering, the truth, not falsehood." Her moving rendition of "*gate gate paragate, parasamgate, bodhi, svaha…*" captured for the audience something of the transformative power of the sheer sound of these words. This Sanskrit chant was a most appropriate precursor to the Saraswati Vandana (Prayer to Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning), by the accomplished Dhrupad singer Aditi Sharma Garg, who hails from a family of musicians. Ms. Garg has been holding chanting workshops for WBCT, and this time too she expounded briefly on the concept of 'Naad' in the Dhrupad school of classical Indian music, before moving to an 'alaap' in Raag Saraswati to prepare the musical ground for the main prayer, which is a beautiful song in praise of the traditional Indian feminine embodiment of all the arts, speech, dance, and learning in general.

After the Sanskrit recitations, the event moved to a melodious chanting in Pali of lines from the *Mangala Sutta*. Sung in a deeply resonant voice by Ms. Rekha Pandey, who is currently Faculty at the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, the *Sutta* describes an encounter between a certain

deity and the Buddha at the forest grove called Jetavana, Savatthi (Sravasti), in which the Blessed One elucidates what qualities and accomplishments constitute the highest blessings in human life. These stress on cultivating wisdom, ethical conduct, and mindfulness in daily life.

After the musical treat, there was a short but mesmerising music-and-dance presentation by" Zulaikha, the Storydancer", an American-born practitioner of a unique style of graceful body movement that creatively uses masks, costume, and the supple, free body to enact a meaningful performance with a message. Dedicated to healing through music and movement, with a background in classical music and kathak, Zuleikha dedicated her enchanting performance that day to the cause of human freedom from all illness and epidemics.

No birthday celebration is complete without sharing of food, and the audience – which ranged in age from 2 to 82 and from children to eminent scholars, writers and artists totalling to about 35 participants-- then repaired to the lawns of the IIC Annexe for a small cake-cutting ceremony followed by a vegetarian lunch served under the warm February sun. It was an intimate, meaningful event thoughtfully put together that brought people together into a contemplative and celebratory space.

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