



May all beings everywhere be happy and free!

Saligrama K. Aithal

Shrithi called a meeting of her fellow beings, as the queen of her realm treaed everyone, big and small, --elephant and ant, lion and lamb, -- as her equal. Democrats from the Human World among the readers, be not proud!

When the pandemic Covid- 19 struck India, the country of her birth and upbringing, like a tsunami, taking toll on men, women, and children in hundreds of thousands a day like no other country of the world, Queen Shrithi didn't have the heart to stay neutral in the war of between two of her subjects.

Well-versed in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and his treatise on Logos, Pathos, and Ethos to persuade an audience and additionally having read good many of the great speeches by world leaders, she spoke

about the issue before them and to arrive at the best decision to take under the circumstances consistent with the norms of goodness, justice, and nobility.

Everyone came out from their dens, caves, air, water and other resting places into the open field to see and hear *via* the module of light, heat, and air, --corresponding video conference of the Human World. From the palace window, Shristhi addressed the gathering. She started from the beginning and went over the whole history of life from the beginning to the present day which had brought matters to the current state.

The speech was received by the audience with interjections throughout, translated into English, *Aha! Jeez! Fy! Ha, Ha! Heigh-Ho! Blah Blah! Hoo-Hu! Hm! Hmm! Bah! Ick! Shoo Shoo! Ugh! Yum! Zowie! Voila! Alas! Amen!* and with clapping of legs, flapping of wings, swinging of branches, blowing of wind, thunder and lightning, and so on.

“In the beginning,” Shristhi began “there was *Lokah Samastah*, World United, --one, united, whole— spread across the globe. You very well know much of the story, so bear with me if I go over it today in my speech. I am recalling it in order to help you look at the problem from a larger perspective.”

As the speech was in progress, Logos stepped in.

Reason and logic took the lead.

“With the passage of time, *Lokah Samastah* divided into two realms, --Human and Nonhuman, the latter simply called Nature to which you and I are cast out not by any choice of our own. So be it! The two realms existed side by side as neighbors. As neighbors, our relationship fluctuated—sometimes friendly, other times hostile. Part of the problem was that the residents of Human World took pride in the fact, --fiction if you ask me,-- that they are the fittest among the living species at the top of the so-called evolutionary process and therefore the God’s chosen candidates, so treated the citizenry of our Non-human World, Nature, as their subordinates,

vassals at their service, forgetting what were basic instincts were very much a part of their being, no matter how far above us evolved they claim they are, from which they had no escape. They turned the instinct of survival into a faith, and they used all kinds of tricks to show they are the fittest in the race. They simply refused to acknowledge the connecting link between the two Worlds.

“With the passage of time, the subjects of the self-chosen leaders of Human World assumed “*I*” for reference for individual persons and “*WE*” for reference collectively, giving “*IT*” to individuals of Non-human World and “*SHE*” to refer to Nonhumans collectively and also their queen, Shristhi, me—the pronouns with unflattering connotations. At times, they addressed me as Mother Nature. However, I didn’t see much of motherly feelings among them towards me. You agree with me that prayers, rituals, and words have no meaning unless they are supported by action.

“With the passage of time, the self-chosen leaders of Human World split into many Worlds, -- countries and nations, -- each claiming ownership of a specific geographical area.

“With the passage of time, the countries of the Human Worlds drunken with power after their victories engaged in wars with their neighbors to expand their territory and establish their authority over others. Quite a few cast their net wide and went to conquer Human Worlds of their own species, around the planet earth and in outer space.

“With the passage of time, a few developed highly sophisticated weapons for defense and also for further expansion. Those weapons could destroy not only the rivals but wipe out all the Human Worlds from the face of the earth, including the unwitting attacker, and also the Non-human World, Nature, me, your queen, their Mother, alongside.

“During all this time, Human World exploited Non-human World to the maximum causing deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, water pollution, oil depletion, ozone depletion, greenhouse gas increase, extinction of species, the list goes on.

“They know for sure that their life depends on us every living moment. Without our constant supply of air, water and light, they cannot survive a single minute on this planet. Millions of bacteria reside inside their own bodies to keep them in good shape. We provide them everything they need to survive. What do we get in return? Long speeches expressing their gratitude on annual Earth Day celebrations, and that is it. What do words, however sweet, mean without action. Nothing! Zero!

“They have disconnected themselves from us, busy with their ambition to conquer the world and space and in pursuit of progress, economic development, wealth, and material possessions. They even neglected to protect themselves from attacks launched from certain quarters from our Non-human World, Nature, angry with acts of commission and omission from the Human World. These quarters have expressed their displeasure, off and on. We have remained strong and united, if intellectually inferior or none at all, measured, mind you, by their self-promoting IQ scale. After repulsing one attack after another, they assumed that they had shown us our place by medical discoveries of vaccines until the next attack. After resisting our attacks, they returned to their normal duties—economic development and wealth and material possessions.

“The Non-human World remained united under their Queen *SHE*, Shristhi. Certain members of Non-human World quietly and independently went on working and didn’t give up. Finally, they invented the weapon Covid-19 mentioned before to bring residents of Human World across the countries of the Human World to their knees. It is still not quite clear whether the virus came into being by its own free will or it was a forced delivery done by a country of the Human World with ulterior motive of conquest of the entire Human World and expansion of their empire. Why spend millions inventing nuclear weapons when the job could be accomplished by a few cents! Whatever played a part, we recognize the virus as one of our own. Turning loose the weapon, the virus took thousands of lives and is killing thousands more day after day, putting the still living of

Human World under lockdown and stopping them from stepping outside their homes without risking their lives.

“Now is the time to take a decision, and therefore this assembly—let things take their own course; or do something to avert the worst excesses Covid-19 with its mutations and mutations.”

At his point, Ethos and Pathos entered the logical discourse.

Reminded by the new entrants, Shristhi’s speech took a turn to dwell on all the good and the noble individuals and the works from one section of the Human World in history.

Shristhi continued. “True, among them were and still are noble individuals who treated Non-human World as a part and parcel of their lives and maintained the original connection of the two spheres, no matter how their contemporaries treated us. In whatever they said or wrote for consumption of Human World, you see the connection of the two Worlds on every page and verse in their works.

“In fact, we have many examples where the original impulse to sing/ recite/ write springs from the Non-human World. Recall the inspiration behind one of those works, *The Ramayana*. Valmiki, a sage, sees a crane couple happy mating and he feels happy too to see the two happy. The next moment, he sees the male bird shot and killed by a hunter and hears the surviving partner scream filled with shock and agony. Behind the creation of the epic *The Ramayana* is Valmiki overcome with grief over death of a bird and bereavement of its partner. A bird killed; an epic born. Just think of it!

“Take any religion Christian, Islam, Buddhist, or Hindu and their prophets, scriptures, epics and legends, you will see them all filled with allusions to Nature. The plot and action in their stories couldn’t move an inch forward without the enlistment and cooperation of Nonhuman World.”

Style didn’t stay behind. It also joined the group—clarity and appropriation with word choice; liveliness with rhythm and

figuration—rhythm with sentence variety, and figuration from schemes and tropes.

The tone of discourse changed.

One name stood out in her mind among the modern writers-- William Wordsworth.

Shristhi recites his famous lines.

*“Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher”*

Shristhi goes on to say, “What wonderful nature imagery is contained in the short poem from which the quotation is taken, all drawn for the poet’s support of his view from the Non-human World-- the mellow luster of the sun, the mountain’s head, long green fields, the blithe song of the thistle, and vernal wood full of lessons on moral evil and good!”

“How we wish the Human World paid heed to their own prophets and poets! Were they not treated as if they were nonexistent?”

After taking into account all the variables of the rhetorical triangle— Logos, Ethos, and Pathos for invention of means of persuasion —the rhetor, the subject, the audience, the means, the end/purpose; and rhetorical appeals -- logical, ethical, and emotional,-- Shristhi saw the need to arrive at a judgment based on practical wisdom, moral virtue, and good will to the benefit of *Lokah Samastah*.

“Now what choice we have before us. Choice 1. Unattractive and even cruel and painful though it might appear on the face of it, maybe the better thing to do is to do nothing and let the situation arising from the outbreak of Covid-19 take its own course—. What do you say?”

“Spare the rod, spoil the child?” the audience butted in. “We might have to face a worse plight, if we recall our brave Covid-19 warriors.

“Choice 2,” Shristhi continued, “Let us provide what help we can without hurting our integrity to the Human World to discover a vaccine to stop the attacks from the virus. Let us assume that there would be survivors from this pandemic. Those survivors would hopefully—yes, lets us assume that they *hopefully*, -- mend their behavior and be ready to work in coordination with us to bring about the reunion of the two Worlds and re-creation of *Lokah Samastaha*. This is a good time to start over and with hope. Hopefully, enlightenment would come to surviving the Human World. Don’t you think it would be a good idea to give them a second chance so that it can start over?”

On hearing Queen Shristhi’s decision based on good will and justice, the audience gave a big round of applause to Choice 2.

“Amen! Amen!” the audience shouted in one voice.

She prayed, “*Lokah Samstah Sukhino Bhavantu!* May all beings everywhere be happy and free!”

The audience joined in her prayer, “*Lokah Samstah Sukhino Bhavantu!* May all beings everywhere be happy and free!”

With the closing of the meeting, the members of the assembly returned to their holes, burrows, nests, caves, trees, gardens, forests, mountains, water, ice, places in the human body—skin, nose, throat, mouth, and the gut,—chanting “*Lokah Samstah Sukhino Bhavantu!* May all beings everywhere be happy and free!”

This story has been first published in the book titled *Home and the World* (Heritage Publishers, New Delhi).

Saligrama K. Aithal

Saligrama K. Aithal has published six collections of short stories *Many in One*, *One in Many*, *Inside India*, *Overlapping Worlds*, *Passage to More than India*, *Make in India and Other Short Stories* and *Home and the World*. His publications include a collection of poems *Flowers and Weeds*, a literary biography *Riyana: The Child Once Everyone Was*, and a study of Toni Morrison's fiction *Toni Morrison Novelist*. His fictional writings have appeared in *Critical Quarterly*, *Short Story International*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Long Story Short* (where his "Enter, Search, Select, Click" appeared as the *STORY OF THE MONTH* for February 2012), *Journal of Postcolonial Societies and cultures*, *Indian Literature*, *Warscapes*, *Projected Letters*, *New Quest*, *Contemporary Literary Review India*, *Sci Phi Journal*, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, *eFiction India*, and *Indian Ruminations*. Likewise, his scholarly articles on authors --Indian, British, and American--have appeared in a host of national and international journals.

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