

**Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures  
Krishna Srinivas— President of the World Poetry Society;  
Cofounder of the World Congress of Poets**

Eternity is here  
in infinite Now,  
in illumined Now,  
in freeze of Fate  
in death of Hate:

*(from "Fire," The Five Elements, by Krishna Srinivas)*

WHEN I first met Dr. Krishna Srinivas, he shared with me his long-cherished desire to celebrate through his poetry the five universal elements of Indic tradition—earth, water, fire, wind and void. Speaking with natural rhythm, Dr. Srinivas said, "Fulfilling this is my mission. Once it is complete, I don't care what happens to me."

The voice most honestly conveys a person's true nature. The cadence of Dr. Srinivas' speech more than his words themselves revealed the selfless nature of his character.

I was in Kanagawa when we first met. I remember the magnificent summer clouds that rose in the sky at the far end of Yokohama Harbor that July in 1979. The sky was filled with light and the sea sparkled, as if laughing at the inexplicable rivalries and conflicts of humanity.

Here, I received my tall, slim, distinguished Indian guest, who hails from the port-city of Madras, and together we spent the afternoon enjoying a wonderful discussion over poetry.

I will never forget Madras. It was there in 1961, some eighteen years before we met, that I first set foot on Indian soil, that great "land of the spirit." I was deeply impressed by the bustle, the dynamism and, at the same time, the serene air of eternity that pervaded the city. It was as if time flowed differently there.

Since 1960, Dr. Srinivas has published a monthly poetry magazine, *Poet*, from Madras with subscribers in over fifty nations. He is also the president of the World Poetry Society and one of the cofounders of the World Congress of Poets. Our first meeting took place when he stopped over in Japan on his way home after attending the fourth meeting of the World Congress of Poets, in Seoul, South Korea.

"The great poets have disappeared," he told me with a deep sigh. "Through my work on *Poet*, I read poetry from around the world. While there are many good poems, there are no great ones. Some years ago, I published a collection of my own poetry entitled *Dance of Dust*. In it, I make the point that though the poetry we see today is somehow insubstantial like a dance of dust, someday a great poet will definitely appear."

*Dance of Dust*, published in 1946, was highly acclaimed by many of this century's most respected poets and critics, including T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden,

Stephen Spender and others. Such praise naturally contributed to making a name for Dr. Srinivas. "A true poet," he maintains, "is one who speaks of the cosmos, the spirit and the truth... A poem must always have a message; it must be eternal."

By "message" he means something that a poet feels an irrepressible compulsion to articulate. Once this task has been completed, a poet would feel no regret even if facing death. If this message could not be communicated to others, however, life would not be worth living. A poet is one in whom such a flame burns and explodes into words.

The flame that burns within Dr. Srinivas led to the creation of a long poem titled *The Five Elements*. The five elements, I remarked to him, "are the components of our lives. Each life, just like the cosmos, is comprised of earth, water, fire, wind and void. In other words, the five elements express the philosophy of oneness of the individual and the cosmos. At the same time, the five elements correspond to the five Chinese characters of Myoho-enge-kyo."

Dr. Srinivas completed *The Five Elements* in 1981. It is an epic poem that ennobles the essence of each of the five elements that pervade the universe. He infuses his whole life into this poem—becoming one with the river, rising up with surging waters and cleansing the banks that represent the twin forces of creation and destruction. He becomes the wind, galloping without obstruction through space. He becomes the sacred flame, purifying all humanity, and he becomes the earth, building a heavenly realm where we live. And then there is the void.

"Alone? No ... You are not alone!" ...  
A whisper from Afar—  
from beyond galactic clouds  
of interstellar dust  
measuring light years  
and millions of suns —

•••

I come from realm of Reality—  
everlasting pyramidal creations—

•••

From this phoenix realities  
will sudden bloom a  
new Eden—  
a Race of stalwart men  
and flower women  
with eyes to see  
histories in make and

ears to hear  
luring music from far off spheres.  
(from "Void," *The Five Elements*, by Krishna Srinivas)

Dr. Srinivas' poetry reaches the height of a timeless and mythic realm. He listens intently to the profound silence of the universe—to the void from which all things are born. And at the same time, he predicts that from its depths will emerge a new humanity that will have "ears to hear/luring music from far off spheres."

HE comments, "The language of the poet is only a small part of the craft of poetry; the rest is silence. It is from that endless, vast silence that the great poets—Homer, Dante and Kalidasa—have extracted their timeless epics and expressed themselves. In that great void of sacred silence where ideas that no poet has yet discovered rest, lies the font of lyrics that no poet has yet sung."

I think that poets are those who see the eternal. Because they experience the eternal with their entire beings, they are keenly aware of the impermanence of all things. The constant flow of life is forever in their gaze. That is why they realize just how precious and irreplaceable every single moment is—this moment now, this fleeting instant. Because of their love for each life-filled moment, poets cannot refrain from giving expression to the poetic spirit within.

Poets always stand on the horizon of time without beginning. They are born anew each morning. For poets, every day is the very first day. They see the world with the pure eyes of the eternal child. And through those eyes, how beautiful the day is! The light of the sun filtered through the leaves of the trees—what a miracle! Silver drops of rain dancing down a window pane—what precious jewels!

Poets, as seekers of the invisible laws of the universe, see all things as expressions of the golden wonder of life itself. That is why poets are forever praising all existence. Poets know that the eternal permeates every aspect of our so-called "ordinary" existence. As a result, they do not value things for their utility. They do not ask, "How can I use that?" but, instead, are more interested in whether things are shining with life.

Poets, by nature, appreciate each thing for its own sake. They do not operate according to the market values of consumer society. Rather, spiritual values are the yardstick they embrace. Even a small scrap of paper, if it is a token of another's heartfelt sincerity, is more precious to them than a million dollars. Science declares that everything is replaceable. Poetry, on the other hand, insists that each and every thing is unique.

Poets are also fighters. They feel a sense of responsibility for the fate of humanity. The inhuman treatment of even a single person, anywhere in the world, is unendurable. Given that each of us is a knot in the great tapestry of cosmic life, the loss of even one individual would make the universe less than complete. These are the sentiments of poets.

THAT is why I told Dr. Srinivas, “In a society that is buried in mundane concerns, poetry opens a window for our hearts—a window through which the refreshing breeze of life can blow. Poetry is the proof of a society’s humanity, the noble song of the human spirit. When love and appreciation for poetry spread to people from all walks of life, including our leaders, society will become a brighter, more beautiful and vibrant place to live.”

The world today is suffering from a serious malaise. People seem to have lost their ability to feel and to care, living in a vacuum of spiritual death. As if the black virus of materialism had blighted their hearts and turned them into automatons, they can feel neither sadness nor joy, seeking only to drown their spiritual frustration in momentary distractions.

Poetry has the power to revive such spiritual desolation. On a broader level, I am speaking of the power of culture, of beauty. Poetry is the dynamic energy that lifts through the summer skies like clouds; it is a living, pulsing spirit that can feel and care for others; and it is the light that sparkles in our eyes. Poetry is where eternity resides.

Dr. Srinivas is 82. He is in good health and continues to work for peace through his poetry, seeking ever to cultivate himself on his epic journey of life. He personifies the dignified words he shared with me on that wonderful summer day: “Yes, poetry is a state of being. Great poetry can only be produced by a great person.” □