WTB Monthly Meeting Minutes - Sunday, March 9, 2014

Jowonio School

Our meeting was called to order by President Joy Pople. Our Mission Statement and Safe Place Declaration were read by Bunny Hannum and Barbara Bova. Joy announced that our April meeting will be at University United Methodist Church at 3 PM on April 13. The subject will be women's poetry; we are excited that several local poets will be there to share their work and thoughts with us. Our May meeting will be our annual Sycamore Garden Tour. Joy then introduced Saro Kumar who had organized and was presenting today's program taken from the Hindu tradition. We were going to learn about kolam.

Saro , born in Malaysia, is native to southern India and lived there during her adolescence. Kolam is a tradition in India which began over 2500 years ago; she became exposed to it when she went there for her further studies. Known by different names in other states of India, similar in some ways to the Buddhist mandalas, kolam drawing is widespread throughout southeastern Asian countries. Kolam are symmetrical designs that women make with rice flour outside their homes each morning. Daily, the woman of the house will rise early, perform her personal cleansing ritual, and sweep the area outside her door clean. She then makes a pattern of dots with rice flower- -the number of dots determines how simple or complex her design will be. She next connects the dots in a closed pattern. This activity benefits the woman in three ways: getting her out in the fresh air, providing physical activity, and acting as a form of meditation. The philosophy behind Kolam is to invite good fortune into your house and keep it inside by making the design closed. It is also a tradition of harmony with the world because ants, birds, and animals come and eat the rice flour; by the end of the day, the design has been wiped away to be created anew the next morning. More elaborate designs are made for weddings and other special occasions. Initially designs were less elaborate, but now colored powder is often used, along with flowers, seeds, and feathers . Kolams are sometimes drawn in front of household altars.

Joy then showed slides of some designs from www.kamalascorner.co and Saro's family pictures. Our group was especially impressed with a pictures of elaborate kolams done by a friend for Saro's children’s weddings. These were done with liquid rice flour so they would last longer and took many hours to construct; once the pattern was established, others joined in to help complete the kolams.

Since several women at this meeting either had visited or were from India/Pakistan and all of us were impressed by the intricate designs, interest was high--lots of questions were asked and experiences were shared. Kolam is only done by women; girls are taught to do this as children primarily by sitting and watching the adults. Ladies socialize and discuss designs, taking ideas from each other. Women usually don't measure the dots as they lay them out. Small, simple designs can be done in five minutes. Apartment dwellers make designs outside their doors; apartments in India generally have a wind tunnel design that is open to the breeze so birds and animals still eat the rice flour. Modern women have less time to make kolam so there are shortcuts. Saro showed us "cookie cutter" type rollers; when filled with rice flour an edge design can be rolled out. Women can also buy premade designs to put outside their doors. Saro showed some patterns she bought in India on her trip there last December. She also passed around an old book containing 500 intricate kolam designs. Today, spirited competitions are held where girls try to make the most elaborate designs. Cow dung was once used to prepare a surface for the designs; a paste of cow dung and water was laid almost like a paint providing a barrier against water and conveying a religious significance. One slide showed a kolam made for Thanksgiving , celebrated in during the harvest in January. The center of the design depicted the traditional pot of new rice and new lentils that is allowed to boil over symbolizing prosperity.

The second half of the meeting involved trying our hands at making kolam designs. At each table (seating 4-6 people) we found plain paper, paper with a dot grid laid out, crayons, pencils, and examples of simple designs. Saro passed out some of the premade patterns and we got to work attempting to copy or to design our own kolams. While some were able to create lovely designs, others of us found out firsthand how challenging welcoming the Goddess of Good Fortune can be! For all, however, the best part about this time was the conversations we shared as we worked on our designs or re-visited the refreshment table.

Joy called us back together to reflect that, like kolam, WTB is about "connecting the dots" through sisterhood, sharing, education, and service. We watched a video montage she had created of the World Interfaith Harmony Assembly 2014. The video connected sound, pictures, and images to give a real sense of the spirit of last month's inspiring event celebrating "Love of God and Love of Neighbor." The meeting was adjourned at 5 PM, but several women stayed longer to chat and connect over the last of the refreshments.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Bova

WTB Sunday Secretary