

Divya Rajeev

Guest Lecture

St. Joseph's College Devagiri

Kozhikode, India.

divyarajeevsr@gmail.com

Self, State and Universality: Re- reading *A Chronicle of the Peacocks* by Intizar Hussain

Abstract: *A Chronicle of the Peacocks (Morenama)*, a short story by the Pakistani writer Intizar Hussain, is a typical example of how the writer travels from personal feelings to feelings of a nation and at last how he realizes the issue of humanity in it. Narrator's own experience forms the crust of the story, politics of the subcontinent is its mantle and humanness is its core. Thus he actually chronicles the voice of his soul. Narrator is not given a name, representing the nameless voices that are in the void. The story was written in 1990's, period of tension in Indo-Pakistan border. He negotiates the relationship and we realize the history and civilisation both countries have in common. Sometimes literature can act as a mouthpiece of the downtrodden. Provided with different entities, it is not easy to define the identity of a human being. At times as a result of political turbulence and differences of opinions, creation of a new nation becomes a political necessity. Mid Twentieth century witnessed the geographical boundaries across the globe being re- drawn and thus resulted in a search for re-defined identities. In many cases, these political boundaries became incapable of encompassing the cultural and historical complexities and the cultural boundaries remained fuzzy. Cultural and historical existence of man is inseparably linked to his geographical space and when the state splits and is itself insecure, it is naturally reflected on one's self. This colonial consciousness of being stranded across the cultural boundaries makes Intizar Husain's stories universal in nature.

Keyword: India, Pakistan, Partition, Atomic bomb, Intizar Hussain.

A Chronicle of the Peacocks (Morenama)

It is not a longing for the past. It is not an attempt to eulogise the pre-colonial land or identity. It just shows the ties that link us. Time, space and distance that explain one's existence melt and what we find is our entity as a man/ woman. So it is not just the account of the subcontinent but something which is applicable to the entire humanity. Isolation, un

certainty, deprivation, grief and disillusionment of being divided and re defined is what makes him relative. In all Intizar Hussain stories, we can find an interaction between self and state and at last it ends in an encompassing note. He shares his personal experiences and understandings which crystalises the meaning of shared culture.

There is a reverence for all beings in his stories. Parrots, peacocks, mynahs, tortoise, all become part of ourselves. This shows the culture of the land from which he comes. We realize that ours is a continued self. Nothing being or ends with us. We are just connecting the past with present, everything is a continuation. The basic needs and problems of humanity is the same everywhere. Great writers have always talked about the absurdity of wars and the need to see divinity in simple, ordinary things of life. Intizar Husain does the same. He accepts differences but talks about accommodation and assimilation. In a self, we find the universe and *A chronicle of the Peacocks* expresses this very well.

It is easy to deceive and evade the present realities by making a personal comment on a particular issue, condemn or a provoking statement. Narrator also tried to react to the news of India's atomic bomb in the same way- to sympathize and free oneself from the duties and obligations. But he realizes that it is not that easy. Jingoistic statements of the political leaders and meaningless arguments and purposeful deviations of the intelligentsia will not help to address the complex situation. The fish that disturbed Manuji is here and what awaits is nothing but complete destruction.

Fable, allegories, parables, epics and folktales are effectively used by the writer to show what rules our consciousness. "The very cradle of love, beauty and peace" has now turned into a land of fear and suspicion. Author tries to see what is common in every war fought, whether it is Saddam Hussain against his countrymen, the Iraqis against the Kuwaitis, Americans against Iraqis, the result is the suffering of the victims. He addresses the existential crisis and struggle for survival of different races all over the world. The war atmosphere not only affects the human beings but also the animals and birds. When the human mind is polluted on one hand, the pang of polluted nature is heard on the other hand. When we are classified on various grounds like class, caste, religion and nationhood, a common platform for humanity is lost. Whenever an apocalypse is at hand, the weak and downtrodden, women and children, minorities and poor suffer than the elite class. . He critiques our congested minds which fail to empathise the fellow beings outside our boundaries.

At that time I didn't recognize the duck as a symbol of our times. I lacked the visionary insight to see he had the grace of a prophet. It never occurred for me

to write a story about him...He was only a poor small duck...what if he had been a royal swan instead of a mere duck?

It is interesting to see how Intizar Husain uses the symbol of a duck to show the conditioned diplomacy, prejudices and monopoly of some nations decide our priorities and attitudes. Internationalism fails and globalization wins, we may have sympathy towards those who died in Iraq(or any other part of the world), but the absence of empathy frightens him, even he can't escape this blindness which spreads darkness all around. The ducks suffering in Iraq become a powerful symbol. Ducks attain the status of prophets in his story. They take upon themselves the burden of suffering, foretell the result of hatred and every religious text sees suffering as a sacred duty.

The royal swans had flown away in search of clean air and pure water. They exist only in the world of fables and myths. Only the poor ducks and geese have been left behind to bear the burden of our times.

The culture of a land deteriorates when its land, air and water lost its purity. Extinction of living beings on one hand and on the other hand we have people forced to leave their homeland, a generation polluted by wars and bombs- the loss of history, past and shared culture. One's identity is constituted by his background and past memories, the myths and beliefs passed on from one generation to the other. When grandmothers are left with no stories to tell, when our memories have nothing to cherish, there is a cultural void. Wars fought in our times not only kill people but also memories. India and Pakistan try to create histories which avoid their shared culture. Pakistan and India were born sixty years ago, but it is not easy to determine how old their common culture is.

Peacocks, the link between past and present also disappears. Narrator's grandma use to tell him stories about peacocks who lost heaven. As peacocks were forced to leave their habitat, here in earth, people continue to be exiled.

Once upon a time he used to sit on the wall of paradise, and now he sits on the wall of our terrace...Yes son, that is what happens when we are exiled from our own courtyards.

His grandma replies philosophically. Whether it is Kashmir, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq or Palestine, people across the world are in search of a tree or a hill where they can find a foothold. When India celebrates the achievement of atomic bomb, the grace that filled the atmosphere, the peacocks lost their harmony. Intizar Husain finds it appropriate to speak about a Hind- Islamic history as he feels that his Islamic past in India did not exist in isolation from the history of the other communities that lived there, that he cannot be separated from

the history of the rest of the land. So Sravasthi, Buddha vihara, basthi around Nizamuddin, Bhakth Meera, dargah etc become a part of his experiences. His soul wanders everywhere in search of his essence, a deliberate attempt to escape from the haunting tension.

Mahabharatha is not just an external war. It is also a war fought in human minds, at the end of which one is expected to find his responsibilities and duties, to get rid of passions, ego and greed. Intizar Husain, in an interview (*Partition, Exile and Memories of a Lost Home*) associates Pakistanis at the time of partition with Pandavas who were forced to leave their homeland, wander from place to place and create a new city. Every time, everywhere across the world people fight their own minds, a struggle between past and present, memories and realities, conscious mind and subconscious, evil and good. Dronacharya warned his disciples not to use Brahmastra and he himself never used it in the war. But war turned everyone blind. India, after the successful nuclear test assures the world that it is only for the defense and would never use it first. But no one can predict its aftereffects and what makes it extremely tragic is the way it can kill generations, a post war nation with barren lands and barren wombs.

Many Mahabharathas are being fought now, A war at the end of which no one can claim victory. A war at the end of which every child, like Parikshith, would be dead before they are born - children born with dead past, history and divided culture. The evil spirit of Aswathamma continues to haunt humanity. We cannot escape from him by creating boundaries. We cannot expect to be "safe at home". The only piece of hope is to sustain memories, to ignite the fire left in us, to hear the past, learn from it and recreate it, as Parikshith did. Let us wait for learnt men like Vyasa and let us have the courage to get rid of the evil spirit from self, state and universe.

Bibliography

Bhalla, Alok. *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*. OUP, 2006. Print.

Hussain, Intizar. *A Chronicle of the Peacocks: Stories of Partition, Exile and Lost Memories*. Trans. Bhalla, Alok, and Vishwamitter Adil. OUP, 2002. Print.

Qazi, Javaid. "The Significance of Being Human in Intizar Hussain's Fictional World". *Journal of South Asian Literature* 18.2 (1983) 187-191. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40872623.