

Chapter Eleven

Intellectuals in Iraq are damned. Most of the youths condemned to indefinite stay in *Tawqif* were highly educated, intelligent and politically aware members of the society. Their crime was that they were vocal and articulate. Not all of them were votaries of Islamic state; but they were all unanimous in their condemnation of unjust, authoritarian rules in most of the Arab states.

There was a young man who seemed to live on the wings of fancy. Alone in a corner, he spoke to himself, chuckled with a smile gradually developing into a broad grin. Young in age, he had a face demure and sage. We thought he was mad, till one day I found out that he was a poet. He quoted several pre-Islamic literary giants, and recited their lines with pride and admiration. At times, he read his own poetry to us. The Muhaqqiq somehow knew that the fellow was well versed in metre and rhyme. Naturally, he provided us a good diversion in a dungeon where there was nothing else to do but to kill the parasites, stitch the torn clothes, wash ourselves, pray, brood over our weird fate, quarrel over trivialities, remember our family and helplessly weep.

The poet once came back from the Muhqqiq badly shaken. His face red from the slaps and blows, his front tooth broken. The pyjama showed blood, for he had been mercilessly kicked in his testicles. In an hour and a half of incessant questioning, no respite was given to him as various modes of punishment were meted out one after the other. He was given a shock treatment, which sent him flying from the chair like fish out of water, tottering to the floor semi-conscious. All this because he was asked to recite few verses of his own to amuse the Muhqqiq. Call it an audacity or foolhardiness, he chose some of the most provoking lines from his notes, the pointed spikes against the inhuman Ba'thist regime, and recited them with candour that was least expected. The Muhaqqiq flew with rage and then hell broke loose.

Faisal, who had been there for nine months, was a lecturer in Mathematics. He was from Jordan, teaching in a University in Baghdad. He left Jordan as a political dissident, unable to reconcile with the despotic rule, and came to Iraq to find a living. Here he married. A year after his marriage, when his first-born was only a month old, he was apprehended. I remember how one morning he woke up with tears rolling down his cheeks. He had dreamt of his young wife and the newborn child. He saw that the

child was grown up—and in the arms of its mother, it gave a toothless smile, spreading its arms towards him as if to say: "Take me father, hug me, fondle me, kiss me, please." Faisal cried for one hour. He was a Mathematician, and a human being. During my stay of four months and two days, I never saw him go to Muhaqqiq. His ordeal seemed to be over; but the protracted confinement tortured him further. What had he done? While lecturing on Mathematics, he at times digressed to touch the burning political issues of the Middle East, and frankly castigated the monarchy and the despotic rules of Jordan and other Arab states.

He never realised that the government's secret agents and informers were everywhere. His own students reported him, and one day, the icy hand of Mukhabirat descended upon him. "You cannot imagine how much they beat me," he once told me. "They seem to have softened down now, for the beating I see these days is not at all comparable to what I have undergone. The rain of *Sonda* falling upon my body turned my skin violet, then black and then violet again. I had a bloodbath" – he said.

The young generation of Iraq and many other Arab states is condemned to decadence. Only those who choose to live aimlessly, whiling away their precious time in frivolity and gain less pursuits, ostensibly inclined to the prevailing rule, can survive. A young man who thinks, has an ideology and original persuasions, is religious and a true Muslim, gives vent to his feelings and opinions, for him all roads point to the gallows. With every young intelligent Muslim Iraqi who is systematically brainwashed, wrecked, finally executed or banished, Islam incurs an irreparable loss of genius.

Yahya, a student of psychology, came from Kuwait. Common to many psychologists, he had his own psychological problems. His wife had deserted him accusing him of impotence, and it became impossible to live in Kuwait. So he came to Iraq where a job awaited him. Human behaviour was his subject, and as he discussed human traits, he cited examples from history. The Ba'thist regime found him a suspect, and pre-empted his arrest before he could discuss the present insane rulers psychologically. He was rounded up in Kerbala, and was immediately consigned to a dark vault, which had a revolting stench of urine and human excrements. Thereafter in a police cell, before his final transfer to our cell, the Haras sexually assaulted him. Needless to say that Yahya recalled his experience with profound bitterness. "They are beasts, these Haras", he would say.

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