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MULTITUDINOUS NUANCES IN FARKHANDALODHI'S "CRACKS IN THE HEART"

Dr. NARASINGARAM JAYASHREE

Assistant Professor of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore

Pakistani women writers have been impacted by the consequences of the Partition. This has its ramifications on their narrative strategies and feminist ideologies. One of the strongest and most credited voices of feminism in Pakistan was Farkhanda Lodhi, a prominent Urdu and Punjabi writer, whose works resonate with concerns for women and their rights as did her interest in liberating them in real life as well. Her short story has been translated from Punjabi by Bhushan Arora, an award winning translator, under the title, "Cracks in the Heart". It is a delicate and touching story of a dove, who, despite being a female, has to contend not only with her natural enemies, but with the intervention of human violence too. Through this story, Lodhi corroborates the fact that, be it humans or children of nature, the women/ female bear the brunt which society imposes upon them. She voices the plight of women through the dove, her struggles in a predatory world, wherein the dove, a symbol of peace, becomes the victim of communal violence.

The story opens with these heart- rending lines: "With the crack of the bullet, the dove would flutter to the ground and never draw another breath. This trauma has been inflicted on her by her own kind". (185) Lodhi here likens the female dove to women, whose worlds are limited to the confines of their family, especially their husbands and children. For women, especially those who live in a powerful patriarchal society like that of Pakistan, their security and identity and familial responsibilities rest in the hands of the men in their family, as they are slaves to their dictates. Here, like these women, the dove lays the reins of control with her mate, unaware of the impending danger:

The kites and crows- may their tribe be wiped out- who were birds like her, had done this out of some kind of spite. These birds which sailed the swift breezes of the deep blue skies had eyed her nest from the day she had laid her first egg . . . while she sat hatching her eggs oblivious of the whole world and of all that was happening around her(185).

The dove has crafted her nest on the *sukhchaintree* as per the counsel of her mate as its thickness would not attract predatory birds. Like a woman, she too has her dreams about her off- springs: "She would see her chicks emerge from the eggs without any evil eye falling on them ... And when they grow up and start cooing . . . this immortal song . . . a song of love, and peace, and coexistence, huq- ho, huq- ho". (185) Like every woman, the dove too desires a peaceful life laced by love. Her wants are simple and justified. She has taken impeccable care to place her nest out of reach of cats as well. Even as a little girl envies her, her peace is disrupted by the noise of gun fire. Both the doves are disturbed by the whirring sound of bullets that whizzed in all directions as they had to be constantly in flight. As usual, they dismiss human concerns and go about their lives.

The dove, like a woman, pushes to the fore the interests of her family and ignores even the most dangerous situations. Then they hear the explosion of a bomb from a distance. The poor birds spend a frightened sleepless night and are scattered far away from the shelter. The dove is not able to find her mate after this bedlam: "Tired and apprehensive, she waited for him anxiously, shivering and dozing, and waking,

through the night. The cataclysmic moment passed but it left wails and screams behind . . . fear settled in every heart". (187)

The next morning, a smart boy finds a dead dove and attempts to assess the reason for its death. While his family is focused on human affairs, the boy insists on giving him a decent burial. This instance affirms the writer's faith in humanity, especially in the future genesis. It is as if she has entrusted humanness to posterity. The boy moreover, is not materialistic like his parents, who are always narrow- minded and cannot think beyond their personal affairs. The author brings to light the frivolous and futile aspirations which humans engage in.

Days pass and the dove is bent on strengthening her nest. One day, the violence which erupts is unusual and the dove finds kites and crows hovering above her nest. Her only thought is to offer safety to her eggs and in the process is injured by one of the crows. Hungry and tired, she attempts return to her nest in the evening, but her wing is damaged. The boy spots her, and unmindful of the bullets whirring past, along with his little sister, attempts to save her from her plight: "I won't let it die ... won't let it die". (190) The children care for the dove and place her under a basket along with some food and water.

The next morning, perceiving improvement in the condition of the dove, the boy offers her a small enclosure. When he returns in the evening, he becomes emotional as the other wing of the dove is bleeding and her injury looks fatal. He finds out that this is because the dove had made an attempt to escape. His sister remarks: "Free birds cannot remain in captivity, Veer . . . A dove least of all . . . Because Liberty is its other name, child!" (191) The boy then promises to set the dove free once she recovers. That night, the boy has a very disturbed sleep and wakes up to find that the dove is dead: "Baji! Liberty is dead ... Liberty is dead". (191)The boy's parents do not send him to school, not because he is sad, but because of the intensity of fighting that day.

This story has multiple layers of in- depth meaning. Using the dove, the universal symbol of peace, Lodhi raises her apprehensions about the safety of life in this world- a world ridden and plagued with conflicts and greed for domination which erases all rational thoughts from the human mind, thereby endangering human and animal lives, pushing survival and humaneness and humanity to the brink of extinction. This a very powerful theme which runs through the entire fabric of the story and serves as a desperate warning and an earnest plea by the author to awaken people from their illusionary ideals and to confront reality- that very reality which reassures that life is too short to be wasted on fruitless endeavours. It is obvious that such anti-social forces have had profound impact on the writer, who through her sane voice, tries to reiterate her stand again and again.

This short story is a wake- up call to those people, who are politically motivated and in their quest are blind and indifferent to the sufferings and loss of individuals. Society is a single unit and only in its harmony can each and every being on this planet co- exist and co- ordinate in unison. If this delicate balance is upset or disturbed, even by a small fraction, it would result in great catastrophe. The dove is moreover named 'Liberty', again representational of that yearning in every woman, who like her male counterpart is born free, but is shackled and manacled by the male- dominated society, to whose dictates she has been enslaved. This is the most powerful symbolism in the entire story. The young girl who is envious of the dove initially in the story is assured by her father thus: "No child! God has given you life among the noblest of his creatures . . . give thanks." (186) This glory of the dove is ironical to the sorrow of the dove in the latter part of the story.

The story with all its emotional moments, not only touches the heart, but also wrenches the soul from the very being. The dove embodies the female psyche throughout the action of the story. She initially finds solace in her bonding with her mate, raises the bar high with regard to her own hopes and desires of raising a family, which develops its initial blow when her mate dies. Any being can only survive one major tragedy at a time. Here the author cleverly brings out the dictates of the society in which she lives, where the mental framework of women is so designed that women cannot live without the support of men. The fatality which other forces lend the dove are brutal, she is unable to protect her nest and is irrevocably wounded that no force, not even love and care are able to save her. Despite all these setbacks, the dove, like any other woman, possesses a strong will- power and maternal and survival instincts for her family, which is her real unbeaten strength, which no man, no patriarchal structure can overcome or suppress. The same is the case with human

life, one disaster and the entire world collapses, making life worthless, compelling the person to go about with life like a living, breathing corpse.

The story also carries strong over- tones of Liberal Feminism. It is a feminist theory which focuses on the ability of women to maintain equality through their own choices and actions. It stresses on equal legal and political rights for women and argues against the misconception that women are inferior to men by nature both intellectually and physically. The dove is symbolic of a woman and the crows and hawks represent the patriarchal society, men in general, who are on the outlook to wrench forcefully all the liberty and happiness of women. The wars and other political unrest are other agents which mar the peace in the life of a woman, further weakening her, inflicting wound on her very soul, until she is unable to recover from one cruel blow after another, until she is finally rendered powerless. Culture too is another powerful ally of the dominant sex. This plague accompanies her till her death crashing her hope and love for life and she is forced to the point of no return.

Though a short story, "Cracks in the Heart" is no doubt an exceptional one, for both the writer and the translator have done full justice to all the relevant themes in it. Partition having had its deep and profound influence on FarkhandaLodhi and the other social and political pressures which ensued, thereby weakening the sinew of her motherland were the most important ones that left an indelible mark on the writer's psyche. The very title bears testimony to this. Despite being a short story, it deals with the most important themes- love, loyalty, courage, benevolence, equality among sexes, relationships and values at the same time condemning unrest, selfishness, male superiority, cultural and psychological conditioning and degradation of women.Lodhi has cleverly incorporated these manifold motifs within the confines of this wonderful short story.

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