

Chapter Twelve

Kamal, the poet had now recovered from shock, though marks were still there to be seen. The speed with which he recovered was amazing, for now as he recalled the intermittent blows and slaps, he giggled and laughed. "I told them; yes, I told them what I thought of them and of their jungle rule." He was pleased with himself because he succeeded in disturbing the Muhaqqiq. Faisal asked him to relate the incident in detail and to recite the verses, which had proved offensive.

Kamal was ready. The poem he recited was too long for me to retain. Yet I managed to commit a few lines to memory. As a student of Islamic history, I had always wondered how the companions of our Prophet and our Aimma, peace be upon them, were able to remember lengthy traditions, sermons and supplications and to faithfully transmit them to posterity. Now I realized how when one is deprived of the tools, not able to jot down anything, then one relies upon ones memory, and memory suddenly becomes more retentive. While in the cell, I remembered many more lines; but just as I try to put them to paper after a lapse of months, I can recall only some.

"I was asked to stand on a chair and recite. Right then, I could only recall a poem by my Syrian friend who had written about Ba'thist regime in Syria, and I thought it applied to Iraq as well. So, forgetting that I was but a detainee, I began." – Kamal began.

Faisal, Fathi and I eagerly waited for him to commence. This would give a mental transportation from the gloomy, dreary surrounding which beset us and an escape from a depressing attitude we had developed towards Time, which ever seemed to stand still. Kamal was also pleased to find that he had listeners, so he threw his Bataniya aside and squatted, assuming a posture of a guru before the pupils.

"History has never witnessed worse tyrants than them,

Not even in the injustice of Pharaoh nor of Haman.

Their era is ruled by the laws of jungle;

Where might is right, honoured by the rulers.

They have filled their cities with evil and sin,

And have rendered every place fraught with vices.

They destroyed the religious schools,

And smeared the purity of hearts and the dignity of youths.

The young and old among them have turned into pimps,

And their women, into whores, like mischievous monkeys.

And the modes of chastisement and torture

Have no precedence in the history of mankind.

Did you ever see a whip, which eats and drinks?

By licking the sacred stream of innocent blood?

Did you hear of a man whose skin is peeled of?

Or did you see the inner ear being pierced?

Did you hear of a man, whose bone is crushed?

And his teeth broken to pieces?

Did you hear of one whose flesh is broiled?

In a furnace, or in a hot steam or roasted in flames?

Did you hear of one, whose urge for passing urine is constrained?

And all his body apertures plugged?”

Qasam who had by now joined us was emotionally affected. He hid his face with his palms and listened. We saw clear droplets trickled down his cheeks on to the floor, and as was customary, we shook his arms bidding him not to cry. He lifted his face, looking intently to Kamal, pleading for more. Kamal was least moved. He perhaps expected this response.

He continued:

“And what could be expected of the mean, faithless people,

Those wretched, basemen of lower birth?

Noble and brave are never born of whores—who

Bring forth only riffraff of society.”

And then Kamal sat erect, proudly looked around as if addressing the whole cell, and raising his voice, said: –

“I am a Muslim, and my bosom is full of pride.

I am a believer, and light fills my soul;

I rise high in glory among mankind.

I shall continue to announce my call with a challenge.

I carry the banner of faith and invite people to join.”

The massive door clicked again, and we realized that lunch was being served. This indicated that it was noon, so some of us hurried to the Hammam for Wudhu and then stood to pray. This was a meatless day, and the rice, soaked in oil, was half cooked. Kamal's poetry had somehow elevated our spirits, and we ate food with relish and Thanksgiving to Allah for His ways, designs and wisdom.