

Fragments of Memory in the Times of War: Dispatches from Unconscious by Ameen Fayaz

Dispatch 1

It is the waste of time. Isn't it? Everything is so boring these days. Nothing is happening. Schools are without life. Markets are without any spirit. The Jhelim is without music. The Wullar has shrunk into muddy Ghat without tides and waves that it was once famous for. What is happening? 'Who are the people coming and going without leaving addresses behind?' Let's smoke out the tension. Pardon? I mean to say let's kill the tension by lighting a cigarette. This is the only way out. 'We are caught in a rat's alley.' Typical. Who is the man whose dead body was found on the Jhelim ghat yesterday? He was without Identity Card. He had no identity. Did he have fair complexion? Yes. Then who else except a Kashmiri? Could have been from any place of Kashmir. Let's run away from this place. It is so scaring here. Anything can happen here. There could be an attack. I can die and you can die and die all of us must one day. There is no way out of this vicious cycle of death. I hear the winds blowing. I hear the thunders roaring. I hear the bullets piercing through the air and blasting our wits out. Who is this doing outside? Who is there with you tonight? May be I am afraid of myself. May be I am afraid of my neighbours. May be I am afraid of my shadows. Just yesterday I saw him dying in the hospital. His body had been pieced with bullets. There was a big hole in his skull. He was photographed by the press. Police handed over his body to us in the hospital. A long procession of people took him to the graveyard for the last rites. Life returned to normalcy after two days. As if nothing had happened. Life returned but with fake smiles and exchanges. People have their own ways of living. They come and go. They ignore the threats that come from passing by cavalcades. When something is shown in excess, it automatically loses its power and when people are used to something, the fear behind that scaring thing goes on its own. The excess of pain is the malady of the pain. I worked day and night to see myself doing well in this field or that field. But it is none of my business. Smoke and smoke for the health of your nation as the nation has nothing except smoke for its people. I see the muddy waters of Jhelim, Wular and other water bodies. It pains a lot. I see the dead bodies floating happily in the water. They have got rid of this dirty world. They call me a pessimist. I am. There are no two opinions about that. I am not a comedian to laugh out everything. Look something sinister happens here every day. Somebody is tortured. Somebody killed. Somebody molested. Somebody raped to death in Nalla Rambyar. Murder. Murder. Foul! Foul! They ask me about my aspirations. I say I have none. What could be my aspirations in such a world. What should I think? Nothing. Nothing. Thinking is a crime. An unpardonable crime in "democracy." Shouldn't there be a reason in my pessimistic outlook? Why should there be a reason when reason has taken a long sabbatical in this muddy and marshy land? Let's come to a point. I am just beating about the bush. Actually, everybody has learnt

this art. So have I. Aint I a part of this society? Am I not the child of my own times? Don't I exist in this time and space? Or I am a mere shadow. A shadow of somebody else. Or do I think what actually somebody else has been thinking for hundreds of years. Whatever I am, I am. I am afraid of myself. I am afraid of shadows that my country is full of. I am afraid of the mettle that is available here in thousands of tones in the hands of uniformed men. I am afraid of those who swear by the God that they will serve their people but never do that actually. I am afraid of those who preach hatred in the name of love and mercy. I am afraid of occupation and possession, of imperialism and expansion. I live in the prison of my being and you live in the prison of yours being. How can we break free from the walls of this prison? What is freedom? I want to taste one single day of freedom under the sun. Without any fear and without any shadows. It is so serene today. We can go for a long drive. May be to the hills. But. To hills? It is a sin. Come on. Hills are only for Goras. Not for the dirty bearded natives! Why? Ask anybody. Slaves are not for adventure. They are for their master only. Why should we enjoy our life? The Master will be very angry. He has very recently got some sophisticated cameras installed here. Any second you think of something against his wishes, PSA or AFSAPA can be invoked. Law belongs to the lord and lord has every right on your body and soul. When the soul belongs to him, how can our thoughts be our own? Aren't our thoughts then planted on our minds by the software operators of his kingdom? Can be anything. Can be nothing. We are nothing here and so nothing happens. Let's ignore. Let's be and become. Shhhh! This is blasphemy. This is dangerous. You cannot be and you cannot become. The waters are muddy these days. You cannot see through it. It is no more a mirror. It will never show you your face. I am not a Sufi. I cannot ask you to find your soul. Souls are for sale here. Sufis are in jails here and heads are in chains. You better decide yourself. Where shall I go? What shall we do? The sun is out again. Clouds have vanished. Let's look out from this window of the prison cell and feel what comes from the Sun. Hello! Do you hear me? My whispers have probably bored you. OK. Fine. Let you play some sweat music on the tape recorder that you have smuggled in. But, sorry. In jails, happiness is the worst form of sin. You have to listen to the music of your own soul if there can spring anything at all.

Dispatch 2

Sweet little birds in the air. Flying across boundaries without any barriers or obstructions. Can we be like them? That is a sweet dream. I wish to dream it again and again. You know what is the cost of this dream. Sacrifice. Sacrifice of possession. Are you ready for that? You have to take a decision. Only free people take decisions in the world. Slaves only follow what is dictated to them. Those sweet little birds are free. That is why they fly. Methought it will never bother us all here in this hell where we are consumed for all eternity. Can we create a heaven in this hell? Can we just manage to extinguish these fires with the waters of love or just dews of love and mercy? It is good that at least these birds are flying freely. I am happy to see it. It gives me a reason to bear the pains in hell. It gives me a reason to long for their free flights. Why not? You live another day no matter whether there is any sign of life, of freedom and of happiness.

We the residents of this hell are sometimes allowed to enter the heavenly gardens or have a glimpse of hillocks from the heaven. Only occasionally against some payment. We despite in pain manage to grease their palms. How sad! Why it should be occasionally? It is such visits and glimpses of the heaven that sustain the hope and give a reason to bear the pain in the hell. Hello! Are you there? Do you hear my whispers? I cannot speak loudly. There is a strict ban on speaking loudly. They say silence is golden. If you have to live longer keep silent and don't shout on any issue that you confront. This is an age old formula. I wish I were with you when you would really need the company. You are terribly alone in that cell. Together we could do some playing with words by reading or writing. At least we could think of some method. Yes, method. Or a plan. Because we have no plans. We go on like going without seeing left or right. Those flying birds remind me of that imagined past .When you could go for months holidaying in the Pir Panchal running after herons, wild animals ,rear ewes and rams in meadows and looking for the rarest hunt. Free. Without any border pass. An I Card. The burden of your identity. Your own ugliness. You would just decide and go into the mountains and spend months there with shepherds listening to the music of nature and enjoying the freedom of natural objects at their best. It is not possible. You have to wait now. You and I and every body have been condemned to be what we should not have been .I will take you out of this cell and arrange a cup of tea in the middle of Wular lake in a Shikara. We can also go for a round in the nearby forest and look for the traces of those who lost their way and were condemned to nothing just for a bullshit. Just for nothing. Maybe their traces are still there somewhere around. Their story is quite a misery for the collective consciousness of the residents of this hell. I deliberately ignored that bull. It was attracting my attention by its wild horns. It was risky to even see it. You should not concentrate on a thing that may take your life. I saw him pissing in his trousers. He was very much afraid of that bull which has sworn by the might of all wild forces to mitigate all traces of life from this hell. I am quite surprised to see even cocks, hens and dogs also joining the forces of wolf. Wouldn't it be a suicide for these lesser beings? The flutter of wings that I hear in the air is no less than music that liberates. There must be something that liberates. Something that elevates. These flying birds elevate my soul. Their music in the air drops food for my soul. What is body without soul? A big nothing that would be even nothing for insects. What is soul without body? Again a nothing that nobody can see or touch but it would be there .Only free people have souls. In the hell, we eat, drink and sleep without ever getting some time for tending our souls. Did you hear of that man in his early thirties whose head was crushed so that the soul that he had borrowed from outside could be removed and asked to go back where it had come from? The man cried a lot. It was a painful experience for him but not for those who were crushing his head under the minaret of a Masjid. When his soul was removed, the guys felt happy that one more soul bearing the virus of consciousness, reason and rebellion was finally done to death. There were celebrations in the house of their leader and wine was distributed free. Everybody wants freedom. You from me and I from you. The most dangerous thing that they find is the one when you ask for the return of yourself and you question what they have decided for you years ago. Questioning the decisions of

forefathers is a sin and if you do this ,burn ,burn ,burn in the fires of this hell where lots of iron ,mettle and other chemicals have of late been concentrated for the treatment of those who dare to think and question the wisdom of men having power and the book of law. The birds have come back to their nests after a daylong flight. Do you see that graveyard? His grave is now twenty-five years old there. Then he was hardly twenty and just six days before his marriage during the Operation Vikram of 1991 he was done to death under a roller weighing more than two quintals. His sin. He wanted to fly. He had questions on his mind. He too had an element of consciousness and it was decided that his soul must be separated from his body so that he cannot transfer his consciousness to others around. Do you hear my whispers? It is not allowed to speak loudly in this part of the world.

Ameen Fayaz is a teacher in English with the University of Kashmir, India.

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