

Catching A Glimpse of the Trembling Flame of Hope through “I Shall Not Hate”: A Gaza Doctor's Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity

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Abstract: *I Shall not Hate* is the hilarious reckoning on hope, narrating the story of a father who clings resolutely to the hope of a better tomorrow for a flock of people. It is a memoir by Izzeldin Abuelaish, a Gazan doctor who lost his three young and lovely daughters to Israeli shells in January 2009. Because this is the ultimate thesis on hope this offers much more than a dozen motivational tomes for the war-victims in all the countries. This is the story of a father who lived most of his life in refugee camps, negotiating his plight with surprising determination only to be shaken and shocked further. Still he clings tenaciously to the hope of a better tomorrow for a flock of people who have suffered oppression for decades. We find this book as a human cry for peace and therefore a relevant one for the people in Sri Lanka especially for those who are from Jaffna and Vanni who still witness the post-war currents in their places. The most of the Tamils in northern Sri Lanka have undergone the similar experiences of the Gazan doctor and they have undergone all kinds of sufferings and hardships such as multiple displacements, deaths, injuries and deprivations of basic needs. Their psychosocial and mental consequences are obviously exposure to massive, existential trauma. This paper as a qualitative and descriptive analytical method explores the way in which this book could be a remedy for the Tamils who still possess scarred minds. This paper will also make an attempt to shed light on the socio political discourses by paying attention to texts such as *The Broken Palmyrah* and *The Whirlwind*.

Keywords: Deprivation, Memoir, Plight, Suffering, Trauma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human dignity has been at the center of debates in most international spheres for quite some time. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in the aftermath of the Second World War, was a decisive milestone with regard to the protection and promotion of human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Declaration links human dignity to the recognition of fundamental rights towards which every human being aspires the right to life, liberty and security of individuals, the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution, the right to freedom of opinion, and expression, the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment, etc. Fifty years after its adoption, the Declaration still remains the Magna Carta for all humanity and especially for the people in war-torn countries like Palestine, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. As a result of the changing geopolitical patterns in the late 1980s early 1990s, characterized by the end of the cold war, the debate on protection and on humanitarian intervention for assistance purposes interventions for humanitarian purposes became a burning topic of the international community.

II. OVERVIEW

I Shall not Hate is the ultimate thesis on hope and human dignity, narrating the story of a father who clings tenaciously to the hope of a better tomorrow for a flock of people. It is a memoir by Izzeldin Abuelaish, a Gazan doctor and a contemporary writer who is still living among us who lost his three young and lovely daughters to Israeli shells in January 2009. Because this is the ultimate thesis on hope this offers much more than a dozen motivational tomes for the war-victims in all the countries. This is the story of a father who lived most of his life in refugee camps, negotiating his plight with surprising determination only to be shaken and shocked further. Still he clings tenaciously to the hope of a better tomorrow for a flock of people who have suffered oppression for decades.

By turns inspiring and heart-breaking, hopeful and horrifying, *I Shall Not Hate* is Izzeldin Abuelaish's account of an extraordinary life. A Harvard-trained Palestinian doctor who was born and raised in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip and "who has devoted his life to medicine and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians", Abuelaish has been crossing the lines in the sand that divide Israelis and Palestinians for most of his life - as a physician who treats patients on both sides of the line, as a humanitarian who sees the need for improved health and education for women as the way forward in the Middle East.

We find this book as a human cry for peace and therefore a relevant one for the people in Sri Lanka especially for those who are from Jaffna and Vanni who still witness the post-war currents in their places. The most of the Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka have undergone the similar experiences of the Gazan doctor and they have undergone all kinds of sufferings and hardships such as multiple displacements, deaths, injuries, deprivations of basic needs. Their psychosocial and mental consequences are obviously exposure to massive, existential trauma.

During the war, the aspects of life in Gaza are described by the doctor as: "This is my Gaza: Israeli gunships on the horizon, helicopters overhead, the airless smugglers' tunnels into Egypt, UN relief trucks on the roadways, smashed buildings, and corroding infrastructure. There is never enough-not enough cooking oil, not enough fresh fruit or water" [2].

Just like the condition of Sri Lanka under the reign of Mrs. Bandaranaike and her policies of nationalization- nationalization combined with minimization and condensation where everything was reduced in its size and people began to starve.

Dr. Abuelaish further states about the condition of Gaza as: "Everything is denied to us in Gaza. The response to each of our desires and needs is "NO." No gas, no electricity, no exit visa. No to your children, no to life. Even the well-educated can't cope" [2].

The circumstances were identical even in Sri Lanka during the war-phase and it is well-described in Rajini Thiranaagama's *The Broken Palmyrah*: "We have now been living under the long shadow of the gun for more than a decade and a half, holding hope against hope for the survival of our children who are dominated by violence from all directions without a purpose or meaning ... Every "sane" person is fleeing this burning country its hospitals have no doctors, its universities no teachers, its crumbled war-torn buildings cannot be rebuilt because there are no engineers or masons or even a

labour force, its families are headed by women, and the old, the sick, and the weary die without even the family to mourn or sons to bury the dead [5].

It is highly symbolic for the bond between man and land when the doctor's very young and beautiful daughters wrote their names in the sand at a beach and when the tide came in and washed their names away, they wrote them again and again. For the doctor, it is highly symbolic that his children believed that they belonged there and did not want to be erased. The same determination is epitomized for all the Palestinians who had had their land stripped from them and wanted to reclaim it. The similar condition can be witnessed even in Sri Lanka when the Tamils have been deprived of their lands in high security zones and long for never to be erased in the land of their parents.

The checkpoints and convoys have been a curse not only for the Tamils, but for the Gazans as well. Both the writers Chenkai Aazhiyan and Aiyathurai Santhan have written quite a great deal of the checkpoints in their writings. For Aazhiyan, "checkpoints are scarier than the monsters [1]". Even in "The Road from Elephant Pass", Nihal de Silva utilizes the checkpoints as "Suranga's road to Kamala" [2] namely as the bridge that makes the two main characters meet one another.

The doctor explains the never routine, often erratic, frightening and exhausting crossing as: "At the border you proceed with luggage, briefcase, and sacks of purchases to the first checkpoint where you present your passport and papers and submit to a search. The Israeli border officers may take every bag apart and search every pocket. There is no way of knowing which treatment you'll receive and how long you'll be held up, so there is no way to predict when you'll arrive home [2]".

Regarding the camps, Santhan delineates about how the people who should go to the camp behave: "You go straight to your camp and if you happen to come across any of our people, (army of soldiers) just raise both your hands above your heads and stay where you are without moving [3]".

While this is the life for Gaza residents, the doctor says, it's hard for civilized people to believe what happens there: the humiliation, the fear, the physical difficulty, and the oppression of knowing that...etc. It is human nature to seek revenge in the face of relentless suffering. When people find that they cannot survive, cannot live a normal life, and as a result, extremism comes on the rise. Both the theories of extremism and escapism as a result of constant mental trauma can be applied to the people who live in the northern part of Sri Lanka due to the war. In the air of hopelessness people try to escape or to seek solace through self-destructive behaviours and as the consequence, the current issues in Jaffna are cultural degradation, prostitution, consuming alcoholic beverages even at very young age, thefts, and all sorts of cruel and murderous acts. As for the doctor the acts of violence, committed by the Palestinians are expressions of the frustration and rage of a people who feel impotent and hopeless.

And, finally, when the war reached its peak and for the climax Israeli shells hit his home in the Gaza Strip, killing three of the doctor's beloved daughters and his niece in January 2009 during a 23 day attack on Gaza. As the father whose daughters were killed by Israeli soldiers during Israel's incursion into the Gaza Strip, his response to this tragedy made news and won him humanitarian awards around the world. Although angry and deeply grieving the death of his daughters, Dr Abuelaish felt no hatred towards the Israelis who had conducted the unprovoked attacks. His live interview on Israeli television just hours after their deaths captured world attention not just on the

plight of the Palestinians living in Gaza but also astonished by the absence of calls for revenge, a call which many would have expected. Instead, he called for peace and cooperation between the two sides, for an understanding and acceptance of each other as individuals deserving of respect.

It's about his ability to rise above horrific personal tragedy - the killing of three of his daughters by Israeli Defence Force (IDF) shells and his decision: "I had two options to choose from: I could take the path of darkness or the path of light [2]".

He chose the path of light, because, as he writes: "I believe in co-existence, not endless cycles of revenge and retribution. And possibly the hidden truth about Gaza can only sink in when it is conveyed by someone who does not hate [2]".

When his dead daughter Bessan was alive some of the comments she made for a film had deeply moved the father. She said: "There is more than one way to solve a problem. To meet terrorism with terrorism or violence with violence doesn't solve anything. She also admitted that it's hard to forget what has happened in Gaza: the humiliation, the oppression of being basically imprisoned in Gaza and denied basic rights. That hurt of injustice lingers. Near the beginning of the documentary she says, "All problems can be solved by forgiving the past and looking toward the future. We think as enemies; we live on opposite sides and never meet. But I feel we are all the same. We are all human beings [2]".

III. CONCLUSION

Though making this choice towards light was clearly a conscious act, the readers aren't surprised because they have seen him making this same choice throughout the book despite, as he says, being "tested by brutal circumstances the whole of my life, as have many people in Gaza". Even though he has every reason to be frustrated, disappointed, and offended by the environment he's lived in, but he is not. Just like the doctor who took medicine as the weapon to transcend the ethnic barriers and forgave his enemies who killed their daughters each and every human being should follow his footsteps holding education, courage, forgiveness and reconciliation as his armament. Thus the book, *I Shall not Hate* is a human cry for peace for the people who are in the war-phase and for forgiveness and reconciliation for the people in the post-war phase and the book takes courage to refuse to hate, to refrain from advocating revenge. This book, *I Shall not Hate* makes the readers meditate on the ferocity of the world, but equally it lets them glimpse what is most precious in humanity: the trembling flame of hope.

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