**When the unimaginable becomes real**

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There is a moment in history that is emotionally unimaginable in the present, and can only be known as cold fact, when it has passed. We live at such a time.

The human values that underlie the normative basis of Western democratic states have been set aside in the pursuit of state power. A weird inversion in the functioning of these countries has occurred: from championing human rights to undertaking or being complicit in unmitigated brutality against the Palestinian nation. The protests of millions against this outrage reveal the gulf between ideology and political practice, between the human consciousness of citizens and the state.

What has happened in Gaza has torn apart the fabric of our imagination and made us peer into the dark spaces of the soul that lie beyond the light of our humanity. A nation decimated, residential areas systematically bombed, children dismembered by the blasts, hospitals denied electricity, fuel and medicine, and shattered limbs amputated without anesthesia.

Language itself has been appropriated by state power to prevent the apprehension of this reality, in human terms. The word genocide has been replaced by ‘self-defence’, AI-assisted precision bombing of homes, and the slaughter of innocents within termed ‘collateral damage’.

The International Court of Justice while calling upon Israel to “prevent genocidal acts” has failed to demand a ceasefire. So the blood-letting continues. Law as much as language itself is being manipulated by the ruling elites. Is Israel the only country subject to this contradiction between justice and the practice of state power?

What use are words then? What relevance does form have in expressing the silence of humanity lost in this wasteland? How is the artist within each of us to convey what Rilke called our “depth dark sobbing”?

Mian Ijaz Ul Hassan, painter, poet, political activist has faced this dilemma with an art exhibition titled ‘Devils and Demons’. He has introduced a new genre in his work. His earlier paintings explore the sensuousness of leaves, the delicacy of flowers that beckon the affluent to the classless world of nature through the windows of their opulent homes.

His latest work is a set of abstract paintings that break the bounds of form, to evoke a sense of the macabre. This is done through an associative process that awakens us from the somnambulance of the familiar to a previously unimagined nightmare. Ice cream with a streak of jam mutates into a white ghost with blood-soaked lips; a tomato loses its reassuring rotundity to suggest blood and gore oozing unbounded through the tissues of normalcy; there is a face whose edges melt to become lava issuing from the depths of the unexplored unconscious: the evil in civilized society which we project on to the ‘uncivilized’ oppressed.

This psychological phenomenon was vividly manifested when the Israeli leadership referred to Palestinians as “sub-human animals, to be treated as such”. Israel, which is considered an outpost of the Western democratic, now represents the darkness of its soul.

I have argued in my latest book that the present Western materialist consciousness of power as dominance indicates a rupture from their folk culture and the myths and archetypal images that inhabited that forgotten cultural space. This loss of the vital connection with the lived experience of the past appears as an outrage of citizens against the barbarism of the state that represents them. Or as Jung suggests, a “vague unease, a search for thought forms” and shall we say new political arrangements that “satisfy the restlessness of heart and mind”.

The uninhabitable, shattered remains of Gaza mirror the crumbling ruins of the once-grand edifice of Western civilization. The beauty of their poetry, the grandeur of their art, the nobility of their system of law echo through those silent corridors.

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