**Tribute to Haseena Moin**

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“Writers are historians, too. It is in literature that the greater truths about a people and their past are found”?Sionil Jose

Much to the surprise of the younger generations, those Pakistanis who opened their eyes in the decades of 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s had the opportunity to see a country that was very different from what it is nowadays. Although the social environment was traditional and conservative, yet there was a sense of freedom enjoyed by one and all. Everything was available. People could either lead a pure or unabashed life. After all, what is the meaning of giving an exam if the answers are to be dictated? The denizens of cities then, particularly Karachi and Lahore, could liken it to what present day Dubai offers to awe-struck visitors, especially from Pakistan. The fact is that the concept of true liberalism was quite conspicuous with, on the one hand, night clubs, bars, open sale of alcoholic beverages, movies, cultural shows and on the other, religious gatherings and events with complete fervor. The five-star hotels were thronged by foreigners and tourists from all parts of the world and our national airline served not only hard drinks to anyone who so desired but also boasted of a cultural academy, the troupes of which performed regularly in the country and abroad.

Then things began to change and instead of giving choices to people to either stay steadfast or go for a wayward lifestyle, the government decided to lay down its own code of conduct based on an ideology it considered to be Islamic but more on the lines of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia. Consequently, bars were closed down, alcohol was banned, even the dress code for television artists (females of course) was rehashed making covering of heads compulsory. The earlier Emiratis who came to Karachi for entertainment and spending quality time saw a total turn-around with Karachiites travelling to Dubai for recreation. However, during this tumultuous period, the most affected persons were the women.

Amid political and ideological upheavals the best people to record these transformations are the literary writers whose contributions to drama, poetry, novels and short stories can never be undermined. They either bend before political power to churn out material on pressure from the government, retain their own understanding of right and wrong or put their right foot forward to inspire and motivate the downtrodden. One such name that shines forth is that of Haseena Moin (1941-2021), an acclaimed writer par excellence with an extremely high rate of popularity and success. She recently passed away at the age of 79 but has left behind a treasure trove of literary humour, satire, romance, tragedies, plays on serious social and psychological issues and best of all, stories related to emancipation of women. Veteran poet, Iftikhar Arif has rightly pointed out that Haseena Moin’s heroines challenged the social establishment of the day.

Her depiction of the female protagonist can said to be akin to that of the English novelist, Jane Austen (1775-1817) and like her, she adeptly sketches a vivid picture of society’s hypocrisy, double standards and frivolous customs especially aimed at lowering the stature and capabilities of females. One of her first plays on television way back in the late 1960s was Happy Eid Mubarak where East meets West in an entertaining satire that actually, kick started her career as an original playwright. Earlier, Pakistan Television principally relied on plays that were adaptations of famous novels but Haseena made her mark by penning her own storyline encouraged by competent and clear headed producers of that era.

From black and white to coloured television, Haseena became a household name as her plays and serials, one after the other, gained popularity with young and old glued to the screen when they were aired. Against all odds, although her heroines overpowered the heroes in terms of their personalities and wisdom but the image of males was never belittled. Rather, Haseena always tried to portray the image of an ideal man as he should be, especially while handling the women in his life, whether in the form of a father, brother or lover. This may have been her way of teaching mannerism and good behavior to men of her time.

Haseena has to her credit over seventy plays including serials and long plays in addition to script writing for a few movies. She was fortunate to have some very creative directors, music composers as well as talented artists who did justice to her stories, making them eternal to stay fresh in the minds of viewers, even across the borders where the national television aired her serial Dhoop Kinare. At a time when relation between India and Pakistan was tense, this kind of occurrence was rare with full credits going to the writer, producer, director and amazing actors. She found loving fans in the country of her birth, India and was also approached by legendary movie makers there to do screenplays for them. Throughout her life, she received a number of awards and national recognition when the government bestowed on her Pride of Performance award in 1987 but not before her first international Global TV plays award at Tokyo, Japan in 1975.

Haseena, along with many established playwrights, was lucky to be associated with Pakistan Television during the prime era-from 1970 to 1990-of its existence when generally speaking, the most celebrated plays were being televised. For viewers, there was always something entertaining, classic, witty, interesting and soulful to look forward to in the evenings and the best part was that the entire family could do so without getting embarrassed. Such was the dexterity of those writers whose stories would commensurate with our social norms and values.

While Haseena projected women in a way never done before, she was careful to remain within a certain boundary that helped to remarkably enhance the worth of her character but at the same time impressed upon others the importance of subjects considered taboo in the society. This articulation was her hallmark and went a long way in highlighting various problems that are faced by the Pakistani woman. Her female protagonists were endowed with qualities that made them appear different from the stereo-types with the under-lying message that women were unique. All they had to do was discover their inert potential and make the best of their lives. They could find their independence provided they had confidence in their abilities. They did not necessarily need the support of men if they knew how to steer themselves out of recurring storms which are part and parcel of everyone’s life.

With the demise of Haseena Moin, the world of entertainment has lost a star but whose brightness can never fade away. As a person, she realized her responsibilities and never abstained from using her celebrity status to promote education and welfare in the country as evident from her participation in a GEO-sponsored campaign in 2008. She even joined a political party in the hope that it would help Pakistan improve and become a country where justice is delivered, a dream she would never see accomplished.

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