



essay

Lyotard: Postmodern Positions

By Golam Sarwar Chowdhury

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean Francois Lyotard pronounces the end of what he calls the "Grand Narratives". The postmodern era, therefore, emerges out of a vacuum where no transcendental referents exist. From the Bible to Marxism, western culture has been under the influence of these grand narratives, which have claimed to be universal in their appeal to humanity. They appeared as ultimate truths and sought to provide panacea to all ills that humanity suffered from.

By denying any relevance to the postmodern age of any such universal truth out there, Lyotard, in effect, makes the life of all individuals, male or female, eastern or western, extremely difficult. Existence becomes more challenging following this paradigm shift because the individual finds him or herself much lonelier than ever be-

As evident in his 1983 essay, "Tomb of the Intellectual", anthologized in *Political Writings* (1993), there is no scope to speak in the name of others. In a world where grand narratives are no more, how could one human beings, how much knowledgeable her or she might be, speak in the name of fellow human beings? Speaking for others is like delivering a sermon as there is the tendency of acting as a pathfinder — showing light to a crowd that has lost its way.

fore. In the absence of any crutch, the individual is asked to stand up with no help. By refusing to prescribe a healing mantra, Lyotard suggests that the individual ought to realize that his or her individuality would provide the necessary strength to do it all alone.

Lyotard's philosophy is individualistic as much as it is heretic; for, it recognizes the inherent power in every man or woman. To Lyotard, humans are equal to such an extent that one cannot speak on behalf of the other; there can be no pontification in the name of intel-

lectual authority.

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otard as he thinks that the intellectual has no moral right to sermonize in a world that is free from the influence of grand narratives, religious, secular or whatever. In our postmodern world, Lyotard posits; the seer's vision and prophetic prediction do not exist.

To try to speak for others is an attempt to objectify them; the moment one is objectified, he or she becomes the speaker's referent in speech or discourse. Whether one speaks for oneself or for others, other also lies the danger of presuming to be authoritative enough

to speak: to pass a message, in short, to sermonize.

Lyotard's stand against pontification could be contested by saying that even writing for that matter is a form of authoritative assertion. Would Lyotard in that case regard his own writings as sermons? In response to these probable questions, Lyotard argues that he is not an expert and he does not hold the final solution to any problem. He goes on to say that he is not in a position to prescribe any remedy for the ills attendant upon the human condition.

By refusing to speak for others, the French theorist who also held academic positions in the USA, seems to be saying that it is not possible to do so because of the implicit danger of feeling like speaking for all: trying to become the universal voice. To speak for the rest of humanity implies that the addressee does not exist; the speaker legitimizes himself or herself in relation to the referent and the signification related to the referent. This is where the addressee and the referent become one; the former devours the latter thus creating a politically dangerous position.

Therefore, the intellectual as speaker is likely to create a situation in which he or she could threaten the existence of the addressee, thereby, also threatening the possibility of politics.

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fiction

Encounter With Konok Champa

by Ahmed Sofa

AT noon Ashu returned from school and lied down beside his mama on the mat. He cannot remember, when his two eye lids become heavy with sleep. And Ashu slept quite well. Now the spell of sleep is thinning away. Yet Ashu is not ready to open his eyes. In this half conscious state of mind, Ashu heard the sound of sweet song. The vibration is spreading within himself, like the fine thread of spider. Ashu rubbed his eyes with the left hand and stared around, again closed. The process continued for a number of times. There is a clot of var in the corner of right eyes. Ashu wiped it with his right hand.

Mama is busy with sewing quilt. Through the holes of the bamboo fence three straight lines of Sun ray penetrated into the room. One of those rays fall upon the hand of the mama. White steel needle glitters with the approaching light. When mother bends her back a little for a fresh stitch, the slanting arrow of light touches her forehead and dances there. The left portion of the mama's forehead dazzles like gold. The face of mama is very dark. She is engaged in sewing quilt. Only her two lips moving. She is singing. Ashu enjoys very much the singing. The front room of their house is filled up with the song of mama. Mama is singing.

How could you become stone oh, my parents
By marrying me to a far off place
just quench the burning of my heart
And please take me once
To the parental home.

Two drops of tears running down by the side of the nose ring of mama. Ashu's mama is crying for a change to visit somewhere else. In their part of the village, every body, all the house wives, all the mothers, go to visit their parents, sisters, aunts and brothers. Ashu's mama has no mother, no father, no brother, no sister, none. So she has nowhere to go. When Ashu's papa goes to the field, Ashu's mama sings sad songs and cry silently. It seems to Ashu that tear drops of mama are the most beautiful thing in the world. Ashu's mama has a grief stricken heart. She does not let her grief to be known by anybody, not even to his papa. When Ashu looks at her silent crying mama, he feels very deep in his mind, someone is crying.

Ashu got up from sleep and sat by his mama. Mama is busy in sewing. The thread at the back of the needle is shivering as if it is a thin living snake. The white needle is drowning within the quilt and showing up again on the surface. Ashu thinks the sad feelings of his mama take the shape of songs like the thread of the quilt.

Ashu put his hand at the back of his mama and asked, mama, just sing that song. Mama asked which one? Ashu replied, when you were a small kid like me, used to carry food for grandpa in the far off field, and grandpa would put the hookah on back of the ox, puffing out a great volume of smoke, would sing loudly. Mama said those are the stories of past, I was not married then. My mother ordered a nose ring for me, as big as the size of a pomegranate flower.

Ashu groaned, mama you are side-tracking. Then you will switch on to the story, how your father unguardedly hurted the leg of the ox, with the blade of the ploughshare. You told those things many times. Mama responded at last. Those took place in the remote past. In

the meantime many days have passed. Negotiation for the marriage of my elder sister was ripening. At about that time Jatindranath barrister returned from London with a memshahib wife, colour of her skin was as red as the colour of ripe chilli. Jatin's mother became perplexed, a memshahib, bride for her own son! Where she will put her, what she will feed her? Just then the memshahib bride took the dust by post-trating at her feet. This very incident brought laudation from everyone. People thanked both barrister Jatin and his memshahib bride for this noble act. Mama sighed, Karim Bakshu the song writer, who made a song out of his event died many years ago. Story of Jatindranath is an inexhaustible source of curiosity to Ashu. He heard the song many times, still he wants to hear more. Mama began to sing in a soft voice.

"Well, brother do you have the news our village boy Jatin He not only became a Barrister of London Brought a fair bride along As beautiful as moon."

Mama stopped singing in the middle. Ashu retorted, why did you stop, finish the song. Mama answered Ashu I have got many things to do after swing, I have to go to the bank of the tank to procure kalakochi leaves for your vegetable. Only then, Ashu could recall, he had a dream, while asleep. Ashu told, just listen, mama I had a strange dream, you were crying, drops of tears were coming down by the side of your golden nose ring, and every drop was turning into a bright red flower. You shed many many drops of tears and there were many many flowers. The flowers were dancing in the gentle breeze. It was really a beautiful scene. Then I got up from the sleep and found you are really crying. Mama tried to console Ashu, people dream many strange things in dream. At times evil spirits appear in dream, in order to scare the children. Ashu added, do you know what I have dreamt day before yesterday? Mabud's son Anis was tearing down my already torn shirt. I tried to stop him but he was powerful. I could not resist him. Then I lodged complain with the teacher. The teacher did not take any action. After school when I was returning alone, Anis slapped me on the face. Then I cried out loudly.

Mama agreed, yes Ashu you were crying day before yesterday when asleep. I asked by shaking you, what did happen. There was no response, you were sleeping. Evil spirits come in dream just to make the children's cry. If I could see luta mollah around, I shall collect a magic talisman from him. Magic talisman is good thing. It hinders the evil spirits in scaring the children in dream.

Ashu protested, mama your magic talisman would do no good. Forget about dreaming. In school Anis actually tortures me. He throws my books away, do not allow me to take my seat in the front bench. Mama kept mum for a while. Then she said the evil spirits are really rascals. They come in many guises in order to scare the children. Ashu was not ready to agree with the mama's patent reply. He said then why did I dream the flowers to day. Mama said, the reason is simple, this dream came from the angle. Ashu was not so naive to accept mama's explanation. He demanded, why the angles made you cry.

Mama felt disturbed. I cannot answer your thousand and one questions of Arabian night. I have so many house-

hold works to finish. Speak slowly, your shouting will awaken Foolmoni from sleep. Right at that moment Foolmoni got awoken from sleep and started crying. She was thumping her two little legs on the cradle. Both the legs of Foolmoni are red in colour like the banana flower. When Foolmoni opens her mouth there comes out a kind of monotonous sound in the form of wailing. Mama felt very much exhausted and said this imp will not allow me to finish my work. Ashu my dear, please do one thing, take the rope and



swing the cradle. In the meantime, let me finish this sewing business.

Ashu began to swing the cradle. The cradle is wornout and ancient. With every swing it produces horrible sound. Ashu is afraid, if the cradle breaks away, then Foolmoni will be thrown on the floor. Ashu began to sing a song

Do not cry the baby
Do not hurt your soft voice
Tomorrow, when it will be
Crescent morning
I shall go and buy a sweet
Golden necklace for you.

Foolmoni is not the child to be pleased with promised golden necklace. Her wailing continued. Suddenly an idea came to Ashu, he poured the middle finger into the mouth of Foolmoni and told her, just suck. Foolmoni started sucking the finger. She had two teeth in her lower jaw. She bite the finger of Ashu. Bite of new teeth do not cut. Her two gums are soft. Ashu likes to touch the gums of Foolmoni, with his finger. He brought into the middle finger and poured the next finger asking Foolmoni, no more milk left in the middle finger, try with the next one. This time Foolmoni did not welcome the finger within her mouth and began to cry. Ashu swings the cradle, sings sweet song for Foolmoni. Nothing could make Foolmoni happy finding no other way, he caught the attention of his mama, just look, in the meantime Foolmoni grew quite intelligent, she understands, there is no milk in the finger tip and she does not care for my singing. Mama said, she is my enemy. Then mama concealed the needle in the round bun of hair behind her head. There was a time, when mama used to have enough black and flowing hair, the red thread from the needle is hanging on the back of mama. When picking up Foolmoni, from the cradle, mama ex-

claimed she wetted quilt pillow every thing, how I am going to dry all. Foolmoni sucks the breast of her mama, and there was soft sucking voice. Her whole body is covered with a kind of reddish marks, mama touches those reddish marks, Ashu attracts her attention, mama just look whole body of Foolmoni is covered with reddish marks. Mama answered, since I had nothing nutritious to eat, red marks are due to the bad food. They are a kind of prickle, when began to gather pus her crying will keep whole house awake whole night.



Ashu asked in lamenting voice, mama why did you eat only bad food. Mama became angry. Ashu do not rub salt on the wound can your papa afford to buy the nutritious food? Talk no more, Foolmoni's eyelids are about to be closed. I have to repair your lungi — the one you have torn into two parts, it will take rest of the day. Ashu said, mama you do not have to repair that lungi, I am not going to use it any more. Mama became irritated, what you will put on then? Is there enough money to your papa for buying a new lungi in every month? Last word of mama hurted Ashu's feeling intensely. There is a tinge of anger in his voice. I shall rather stay maked, then to put on that cursed lungi.

Mama wanted to know, will that not put you into shame? When Anis shows the whole world about the wretched condition of my dress, do I not feel shame then?

Suddenly mama became silent. She placed her chin on her hand. Her eyes are vacant looking. Foolmoni smiles innocently on the cradle. Her two new born teeth are as white as laoo flower. She throws her hands and feet, tightly closes fist and pours the one hand into her mouth. She creates many inaudible sounds. When Ashu saw Foolmoni, in jubilant mood, he forgot all the bad feelings. Within a few months, Foolmoni will learn to walk. What a pleasant sight it would be. He told mama, the cradle is totally damaged.

Mama answered, it is damaged long ago. The cradle was bought long past. All of your five brothers and three sisters brought up in the core of this cradle. All of my childrens left me. They are sleeping there beneath the shadow of that Chatim tree. She extended her finger to the top of a standing tree. Tear comes out from the eyes of mama. She wips her eyes with the corner of sari. After the death of my eight children God granted you to me. I visited many holy places, had the blessings of many holy persons. Almost at the end of my youthful age, you came to my lap. Mama embraced Ashu and kissed. Mama looks like a mad woman. The bun of her greying hair became uncovered and dishavelled. With tearful eyes she look towards the top of the standing Chatim tree. It seemed to Ashu that she was gazing towards the eight of his deceased brothers and sisters. Soft feeling was welling up in Ashu's heart for mama. Mama is eternally sad. That slanting ray of light which touched mama's forehead gives the air of dazzling jewel. Whole face of mama is like an alloyed gold. The more Ashu looks at, the more he feels looking again. Mama's face is so beautiful, so arresting. Suffering left deep furrows on the face of mama. At times Ashu thinks, his mama is no less beautiful than a queen. Well it is true that, she does not have golden bracelet, diamond jewel, snowwhite imposing dress. Still his mother is no less than a queen. And Ashu himself a prince.

Now Foolmoni is sleeping. Ashu feels affectionately for his doll like sister. What an affectionate child foolmoni is. What a sad luck, she is to sleep upon a

worn out cradle. Amina's sister swings on a cradle, which is decorated with flower. Ashu wishes to have a new flower decorated cradle for his own sister. Ashu told, mama why do not you ask papa to buy a handy sweet cradle for Foolmoni. I saw many such delightful cradle, the sellers do hang on the market day, near fish market. With the glow of the Sun mama's face looks more pathetic. It seems suffering and sadness radiates from mama's eyes. Mama looks very very distant. As if Ashu is in no way related to her. Mama replied to Ashu in her sad voice, Ashu you do not have the idea about the worries of your papa. Just to earn square meals for the family, your papa has to turn his blood into water. How he will buy lungi for you and new cradle for your sister. Where is the money? After sometime, there will be no regular meals even. Mabud threatened he will not let his land this year to us on the basis of share cropping. When Ashu heard mama, suddenly his heart beats seemed to be stopped. Ashu enquired, where is papa now. Mama answered he had gone to Mabud's house with a plea for allowing us to cultivate the land for coming year.

Ashu is the son of a share cropper. Although very young, it is not unknown to him if Mabud gives the land to other's snatching from his papa there shall not be left an inch of land for the ploughing. What will happen then? There will be no stock of rice at home. Mongola, the milch cow would be sold in the market for buying food. The blade of the plough share will get rust. The Yoke will left unused in the cow shed. Every morning his papa will have to run for daily work to others field. The day his papa would not get any work, whole family would have to starve. All on a sudden tears began to swell up in both of his eyes. He rubbed the eyes, with the back of his hand and told mama, Mabud owns half thousand acres of land, what is the wrong if he makes a few acres gift to us. Mama replied, Mabud grew this rich by snatching the land from poors. It was only a few months back, widow of Akram was dislodged from her home and hearth by the people of Mabud. Ashu cannot find any reason why the rich people cause the suffering of the poor. Suddenly he become thoughtful. Many thorny questions began to pinch the young heart of Ashu.

To be continued

A Disperate Yet Pleasant Perception

by A S M Nurunnabi

Continued from last week

SOME days later, there was a surprise for Sharmila. Tariq suddenly asked her: "Can a Muslim visit a Hindu mandir?" "Sharmila said in reply" "Of Course, but you won't be allowed within the inner sanctum where idols are placed."

So some days later, Sharmila accompanied Tariq to visit a well-known mandir. Taking off their shoes, they ascended the stairs to reach the top of the magnificent structure. The high terrace carved in white marble presented a panorama of ecstasie beauty all around. Tariq was visibly moved, though he belonged to a different religion.

Sharmila understood Tariq's feelings.

Atlast the day came for Tariq's departure at the end of his research work. A day before, Tariq and Sharmila sat side by side at the dinning table Tariq noted that Sharmila was not eating anything. When asked Sharmila said she was feeling hungry. On the day of Tariq's departure, it was raining heavily. Tariq's flight was due to in evening. But the rain showed no signs of abating throu-out the day. Tariq felt that Sharmila might come to the airport to see him off. But the heavy rains nullified that possibility.

When Tariq reached the airport, it was still raining. Then to the greatest surprise of Tariq, Sharmila, even in the midst of the heavy rains, made a dramatic appearance at the airport. Tariq was stunned; he had no words to express

his gratitude. Then to ease the tense situation somewhat, Sharmila said to Tariq: "In your rush to reach the airport, you might not have enough to eat. You just wait here, I am coming back soon." So saying she disappeared and came back with a food packet in her hand which was obtained from the airline office which they were due serve later during the flight. Handing over the food packet, she said: "Do not forget the food when you feel hungry during the flight."

Sometime later, the plane began to move on the tarmac. Tariq could looked out of the plane's window and found Sharmila still watching from the departure balcony. As the plane began its run in preparation for the flight, Tariq visualised the shadowy figure of Sharmila still waiting there.