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Theorizing Persecution and Resilience in Jean Sassoon's biography- "Mayada Daughter of Iraq"

Noufia S.N

Assistant Professor

Mannaniya College of arts and science

Pangode, Trivandrum

Jean Sassoon, the American female writer who voiced, witnessed and had opportunity to meet and understand the harsh realities of royal princess, middle class peoples, servants of royal palaces and war sex slave victims of middle east. She wrote honestly and able to deliver the message to be comforting and empathize with them.

Mayada, Daughter of Iraq, the heart touching and vibrant biography of Mayada Al Askari the granddaughter of Jafar Pasha Al Askari (paternal) the commander of the Arab Regular Army and Sati Al Husri the father of Arab Nationalism, and the first scholar to call for Arab rule over Arab lands and daughter of Nisar Al Askari and mother Salwa. Her family was a popular political house. Her grandparents belonged to Ottoman empire and lived as respected citizens and were the witnesses of disintegration of that vast empire. There were widespread chaos in Iraq Baath party when Saddam Hussain rose to power and most intellectuals fled to neighboring countries. In the tyrannical rule of Saddam Mayada lived her life in Iraq. She was a news reporter in Iraq thus acclaimed twice by Saddam Hussain for her excellency. She was a divorcee and mother of two kids. Mayada had seen Iraq from every angle, Saddam's palaces to his torture camps.

Mayada belonged to a reputed family, an innocent but she suffered like the common folk or a criminal. It was July 19, 1999 Mayada was driving to her office at full speed. There were Lt colonel Mohammed Jassim and his colleagues searching something in her office. Waste bins were emptied, chairs were scrutinized, telephones were opened with screw drivers and seized the computers. She silently witnessed her destroyed future. They wanted to arrest her and ordered her to enter the car. She is unaware of the happenings and begged to phone her children but nothing so happened.

Mayada reached the entrance of the prison within minutes and she saw the Baath Party slogans were plastered on poster. She prayed for her children to be safe as there is no one to care them. She began to cry by hearing the word 'treason'. A man screamed loudly "You lowlives have the guts to print leaflets against the government". The guards ordered her to give all her possession in her hand at present. She realized that she is a prisoner and prisoner number 18. To her surprise and shock was that she was directed to cell no. 52. She pleaded and screamed. As number 52 is an unlucky number for her family. Her beloved father died at the age of

52, grandfather Jafar Pasha Al Askari has been assassinated at the age of 52. She confirmed that her arrest and locking in that particular number cell as aiming as death sentence.

When she entered the prison there were other and women, Mayada stepped inside the prison she was inquired by a lady that why she was here. Mayada shared the official explanation

"The white haired man told me that my printing company had printed something against the government ,but that is not true"(pg no.52)

All the women in the prison were noble and well educated. They were humiliated and exploited for no reason or misunderstanding but not valuing their opinions and explanation. Samara the fellow prisoner and a comfort to rest of the inmates in the prison knew Mayada as she was journalist .Samara, a beautiful lady once married at an early age but her husband died in Iran Iraq war. The authorities sent her husband coffin warning not to open it but brothers of him opened and identified it as dirt and no body. Samara and her family members cannot inform the authorities as they disobeyed the order will create great trouble .samara felt that her husband might be in prison rotting somewhere in Iran As Samara is a beautiful lady she remarried even though with her two kids. Due to Iran Iraq war her new husband could not find any job so they went to Jordan and made profit by cigarrate selling. They soon became financially stable but neglected to correct official papers .They were arrested but pardoned by his majesty King Hussain in Feb 1999. When they reached Iraq they were not allowed to enter Iraq and sent them to prison. They both shared one cell in the Al Ramadi Secret police .Her husband was tortured and even Samara has to spit on his face to revive him. Samara was separated from her husband and she was take to 'Baaladiyat'. Mayada saw and shocked that Samara's foot was crisscrossed with scars of red that cut deep into her flesh. The evil man beat at her soles and picked her up in the air and shouted like anything .She lay in bed like a baby and couldn't go to toilet. The beatings took the flesh from her feet and thought she will die soon.

Dr Sabah was an engineer and holder of Ph D. One day Saddam called a meeting that informed about money shortage and no salaries for workers and they had to come up with a plan to make money to support the government. Sabah was informed that she was arrested for conspiring to undermine the state's economy .The tortures hinted that 50 year old sabah will be given a life sentence .Safana and Muna charged and tortured for being an embezzlement case .Jamila was taken as hostage as her husband and son involvement in Islamics activities. Her cry for her daughters without mother and father. Um Sami the neighbour of mayada's sons were tortured and killed. Aliya a biochemist not allowed to reach her husband and they tried to rape her and baby. Rasha was tortured by cigarrates. They all thought that dogs were treated better than huma beings.

Mayada says and memorise the stories about saddam's wife and his cousin Ali Al Majid. Saddam's wife have been referred as uncouth women as she humiliate and exploit the servants irrespective of their age. Iman one of the prisoner hearing about the relality of Sajida she says "I

am disgusted. We Iraqis starving and there she was, dripping diamond and pearls". The shopkeepers are afraid of Saijda's visit to their shop as she never pay. They can't bargain because they would be killed for suggesting that Saddams wife was nothing but a common thief .Ali Al Majid once invited Mayada to be a reporter of his democratic exercise and she accepted and went for the task. Ali said in the democratic exercise that all family of criminal should know what happened to their beloved ones .He narrated about a man's son has been arrested for treason ,the other man's son a traitor ,a father of two daughter's got 24 years of sentenced death for smuggling..and many horrible happenings in the prison .Ali was an outspoken and he himself praised that he is a kind man. Mayada shivered and she can't move .These are just allegation for not praising or supporting Baath party of Saddam Hussain.

In the book we get vivid details about history of Iraq under Saddam's rule as well as predecessor and his family details. The extreme suffering of innocent humanity and females for nothing .After encountering series of torture Mayada somehow escaped from the prison thus promising to help the co prisoners from outside. She informed some of the inmates through phone but no whereabouts them .Later mayada married Salam for escaping from Iraq on the basis of divorce soon after she reached Amman .This book is a reflection of Iraqi life of privileged class and vulnerable sections in Iraq society.

The biography narrated had a mixture of two elements i.e, the hardship of women being in Iraq irrespective of their financial background or influence and the traumatic torture going on in the prisons .The book had a turbulent history of modern Iraq and their political conquest. The situation of the females and vulnerable that expressed through words can be mirrored vividly. The war for power is ultimately the blow of suppressed as well as privileged classes in a society, where they are physically and mentally blown from the powerful angle of conquerers. The book reflects the hideous troubles that were taking place under Saddam Hussein and to alter their present situation to modernise.

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