



**Translated into English by: Fateh Sami**

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**Translator's remark:**

I came across an interesting essay in the form of short story, written by *Mr. Partaw Naderi*, a popular poet and writer from Afghanistan. The essay entitled, "old man and Sunflower" gained my attention.

In this imaginative writing the true nature of the American- installed puppet government in Kabul, its actions and ill- intentions has been reflected satirically. The owl plays a central role as a destroyer and brings bad omen, as you hear in the entire conversation between a wise old man and an inexperienced curious young fellow.

In this story, politicians and high-ranking government figures have been criticised, ridiculed in a humorous, ironical and sarcastic language. The writer has taken aim at other targets including the overall worsening situation prevailing in the country's whole system of corrupt governance. It is apparently written in an entertaining form, but in fact displays the true face of a corrupt system founded by foreign nations, headed by America. The corrupt and incompetent officials, linked with terrorist groups in the government hierarchy as a whole and in the Kabul palace in particular, have been nestled behind the high concrete walls and fortified metal container fences.

The owls usually take refuge in the wreckage of destroyed and isolated buildings but now the owls are residing behind the well protected magnificent castles. The owls symbolise the government officials, who bring bad omen to our people and country, a sight of evil beings intended to destroy our nation, plunder our resources and kill our innocent children and people mercilessly.

## **OLD MAN AND SUNFLOWER**

I don't know what happened when all at once became completely dumfounded and my attention wandered into that distant village in the damp and dark nights of spring. I said to the old man sitting next to me: You know the people of our village have a great hatred of the bird that they call it an owl or canvas. The canvas is in love with the darkness; it is a night bird; it hates the brightness of the sun. At night, its hoot, tu whit tu whoo, resonates in the ruins of a village or in the dense tree branches, twigs and old boughs. It has ugly and frightening sound. As the owl's hoot rises, people throw stone at it to get away.



People believe, wherever the owls are nesting, there will become a ruined place. At night, in the dark it sings a scary song. It's as if there is a message of horror and brutality. Our village people say that the owl wishes the destruction of the village in its nightly songs, even wants all the villages to be totally ruined to debris, and it will fly over the whole ravaged villages.

People in our village consider the owl an ominous bird. Is the owl found in your village too? Do people in your village throw stone at the owl to keep it away from their village? If so, then why don't they unite with our villagers to stone the owl together to keep the villages remain a built-up and prosperous area.

After my owlish talk reached to this point, the old man told me satirically, 'All those nights and days passed by. The world has a thousand impressions; but your thoughts are still in the custody of your childish imaginations.'

I asked how? 'You see, everything has changed, or it has been made different!', he answered.

The old man stared with his glinting eyes at my eyes and said, 'They cut the wings and feathers of the high-flying eagles. They imprison them in the holes of old trees; in the ruins of darkness. In the ruins they cast for them (eagles) darkness, thirst and hunger; they cut their relations with bright lights and high-flying flights; cut the tall stalk of the blooming sun flowers. They put their green seeds in fire; but the night raising flowers are irrigated with the blood of the peoples so that more and more darkness can reach the leaves and the fruits.

Each sentence that the old man was saying sounded as if the hatred brought a lump to his throat, as though shutting it slowly. He turned away his face and fixed his attention on the ground for a moment, then looked at the sky and, in a voice that I felt, coming out of a bloody throat, iterated, 'Even so, the sun is lying in this land. Even the sun is false in this land, it spreads darkness instead of brightness. So even the flowers in this land smell of blood. The smell of blood of mothers, the smell of blood of children, the smell of blood of fathers, the smell of your blood and of mine!'

I asked, 'Old man! What would you like to say with these episodic and incoherent words?'

He responded, 'Yes, our problem is that we do not know the language of each other.'

The old man stayed silent for a moment, and I felt that all times has

crystallized in his tired and tearful eyes. I sensed that his eyes are familiar with the gloom in deep oceans. He put a hand on my shoulder and said softly, 'You speak of the antediluvian owls; their time has gone. Owls of our period nest in lofty castles. Wherever and in any part of the world there existed an owl, it was called to come down and gather in the castles. That is how the new generation of owls came into being, considering themselves sometimes a lupine and ferocious animal, sometimes an eagle and other time a phoenix and roc. I felt that my mind did not comprehend the words of the old man, I inevitably asked, 'Could it be so?'

The old man answered, 'In the land where its baboons, lying in their dens consider themselves to be the lions and its dissonant and raucous voiced crows peacocking; its owls likewise can imagine themselves as high -flying eagles and rocs (simurgh) of noble status.

I said, 'Hey, Old man! Have the antediluvian owls got now the rocs of high positions?'

The old man smiled and said, 'Never! Never! Owls are the same everywhere. Even if they are called with a thousand names and appear with various faces, they are still similar. They all have a great love of devastation, take pleasure in darkness, fall in love with the night, and flee from the morning and the sun.'

I asked, 'If so, old man! How do the owls live in large castles and do not want to ruin the city?'

The old man looked so astonishingly at my eyes that I started trembling. He was very annoyed and said with a voice full of anger.

'Open your eyes! Today's canvases, although they are nestling in high places, but bear in mind that the palaces have been built up in place of devastation of a territory. These palaces are for destruction. Hundreds of lamps have been turned off, so the light of a canvas stay bright!' said the old man.

The old man kept silent and his eyelids narrowed as if you thought he was after something in his mind, until he iterated:

'*Maulana Hasrat Badakhshi* with a great foresight, had viewed our time over a hundred years before', he paused and then cried out with a loud voice as if shouting and read:

**'I realised by looking at a worthless thorn on the wall;**

**That the ignoble people do not become noble, by elevating to a position.'**

I said excitedly: 'So, Let's collect stones and fill in our skirt pockets to throw at the palaces, so that the owls will be lost from our land.'

This time the old man burst to laughter. He laughed so loudly that his whole body was shaking and said, 'You are not still aware of the world! These owls are not the same as the ones that your father and grandfather could remove by pelting them with stones, from the tall branches of the village trees!'

I felt a sudden pang of nostalgia and asked:

'Then what?'

He answered 'Do not sickle the stalks of sunflowers! And neither do let others sickle them! So as far as you can grow sunflowers in your fields, in your gardens and on the roofs of your houses. Get rid of night flowers, meaning owls, and root them out from anywhere!

He looked at the sky, raised his hands to the sun and said:

'Save your sun! Save your sun that is locked in the chain and blocked to light up again! The sun that you see is the source of darkness. You know that until this darkness remains, the new generation of owls will still

destroy life and everything to have high palaces.' It was like the roar of storm engulfing all of my existence. My eyelids collided. Then, my warm tears slipped down, and I felt them running on my cheeks.

A noise resonated in my cranium, 'Save your sun! Save your sun! My eyelids broke up, the old man had hit the alley. I ran after him, as if the bird was in heaven. In the alley sun flowers were growing in a long line. I saw that on the place of each step of the old man, a sunflower was growing.

I sensed that each petal of sunflower was synchronising a voice saying, 'Save your sun! Save your sun! Your sun ...'

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