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TRANSLATION

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**The Parrots Speak**

By Manzar Kazmi

Translated by **S M Yahiya Ibrahim**

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All pathways emanating from the crossroad were closed.

And the sound of clapping became louder.

The pathway to the area where I have to go passed through the same crossroad. But from a distance I could see the large crowd that was assembled at the place almost closing the entrances to each alleyway. On coming closer I realised that it was a strange gathering. Organised and scattered both. Looking at the dresses, ages, faces, colours and demeanour of the faces and the external health of people in the gathering it was difficult to gauge the reason of their collective interest. At a distance of almost a furlong, at the back of the crossroad, in another part of the market, there was another gathering of people that, on the basis of its round circle and composition, can clearly tell that the attention of this collection of people is on the vendor of cheap sexual medicines. But this crowd, at the crossroad, was puzzling in nature. Here there was neither any line nor any circle. Yes ... there were some people who appeared very enthusiastic as if they have come to see the show for the first time in their life. Their eyes were shining and their faces were red not because of youth but more because of zest and keenness. Though their faces were wonder struck but waves of thrill or curiosity were dominantly visible. There were some who have nothing else to do hence they were there under compulsion. Such people were silent and blank faced. Occasionally they look at the sky as if they were searching something unknown. Among them were mostly the aged ones ... unconcerned and careless of their surroundings and considering the activities of others as child play. No member of the crowd was ready to sit on the ground. Though a few young men laboured very hard for this and spent time in vain. Even if a fellow sits for a while, on seeing others standing in his front, he gets up. People with short height were vexed. In the front a few dozen small children were sitting with flags in their hands. But on looking at their restlessness and discomfiture it seemed that had they been standing it would have been better. Women folk were also in good number and were standing at a comparatively secure nook of the crossroad. All the shops affected by the mob got closed. And all the vendors have lined by the side of the crowd in almost a decorative way. I came to know the reason of this assembly of people when I realised that all eyes are centred on a parrot that is present on a stage made in a hurry. Efforts were on to adjust the height of the mike in accordance with the height of the parrot. Though I was more worried about going to that locality where I have to collect the details of the people as per the government guidelines but when the parrot, in a statesman like manner, saw to its right and left and the crowd in the front, and coughed in a very civilised manner to clear his throat, I also took a place in the crowd.

Silence and stillness prevailed over the crowd.

A voice came from somewhere in the crowd.

‘Speak Mitthu, Sita-Ram’

Too many people laughed at once.

Another voice aroused from another part of the crowd.

‘Sita-Ram, Speak Mitthu, Sita-Ram’

The whole crowd laughed. It seemed that the mob will be out of control.

The parrot standing in front of the mike gestured to one among many parrots sitting around him. The parrot flew from its place and fluttering its wings it was flying over the crowd. People lifted their eyes. The parrot wounded the head of a school boy by its beak and came back fluttering to the stage. All other parrots appeared satisfied at his success. The atmosphere has become serious again, rather it became fearful. It appeared as if the interest of the people in the speech of the parrot has now turned into their duty.

The speech had begun. The prelude was yet to complete when from somewhere close to me a sentence reached my ears.

“Bro, tell me, is the parrot standing or sitting?”

Two young men, whose long untidy hair and power glasses were enhancing their real age, were holding few voluminous books and magazines, started talking among themselves.

“Bro, is the parrot standing or sitting?”

“Means ... ?” another young man was surprised at the question of his mate.

“I mean my brother that ...” Many people looked at them with angry eyes. But they remained careless about others as if no one is around them at this crossroad and if there is any one it is only the parrot swaying on the mike. “the parrot who is at present delivering his speech ... is in which position?”

“His position is better than the others.”

“No no, I mean if he is standing or sitting.”

The young man, who was supposed to answer this, saw towards the dais, surveyed the situation and dropped his eyes. He thought for sometimes and said.

“The thing is that no leg support is needed as such in order to sit. One can sit anyhow. But to stand it is important that the legs are straight upright. The parrot is in this posture, hence in the light of this logic he is standing.”

They felt that people around them have started looking cautiously at them. A few appeared apprehensive too.

“Your logic is true but doesn’t apply on this parrot.”

“How” the other fellow retorted aggressively.

“Because had the parrot been on the branch of a tree what you would have said? The parrot is standing?”

“No, there he will be sitting.”

“But the legs remain in the same posture on the tree too.”

“Yeah, but connected with the tree.”

At this the people nearby were clearly afraid, sullen, resentful and vexed. But the two young men were heedless. Perhaps they were even unaware that the situation there had started changing.

“So it has been proven that standing or sitting is not linked with legs rather with the branch of the tree and the dais.”

“It seems that your analysis is true and on the basis of this my opinions are incorrect but I don’t care.”

At this the one, who questioned, became stern. This is being felt by his friend too that he is squirming, wriggling inside and searching suitable words for a befitting and hard reply. People around them appear happy at their expected feud. I am also two three steps back. But nothing happened from their side. They take out their glasses and clean them with the handkerchief. They lighted their cigarettes and took long puffs.

In the meantime the parrot’s speech has reached to its climax. He is speaking in a very intellectual manner and with utmost energy of his vocal cords. The crowd is ensnared by his oration. A man’s fingers were burnt by the cigarette but careless about the blister, he is striving hard to put both his ears on the stage. And so to say time and again he is trying to stand on his claws in which he succeeds occasionally but fails most of the time. I reverted to the two young men who were earlier talking about the posture of the parrot and just fell short of having a fight. Putting their hand on the shoulders of each other in a very relaxed posture they were now all ears. Reaching to the climax of his speech the parrot suddenly paused. He rolled his eyeballs and the eyes changed their colour. Each and every person of the crowd, it seemed, was half buried in the ground. Nobody moved even a bit. The parrot’s silence was momentary. He time and again rolled his eyeballs and every time his eyes change their colour. On seeing the changing colours of his eyes I have, I don’t know how, reached so close to the dais.

“How he changes the colour of his eyes?” The two young men resumed their chat.

“Not the colour of the eyes ... he changes his style of viewing.” It seemed as if they will embroil once again.

“You are becoming subjective.”

“No ... aren’t the colours become one after intermixing ...”

“Yes, they do ...”

“The same is called style of viewing.”

“Exactly in the same manner as you have become a prey of Aryabhata’s feats.”

“Do you deny the importance of mathematics?”

“Naah ... but what if the digits dominate ... if you feel like they are dancing on your head.”

Now the one who has to respond looked at the sky and said ...

“The birds are returning home.”

“This is not the answer.”

“This is called change in the style of viewing dear ...”

“Means ...”

“Means that now listen to the speech.”

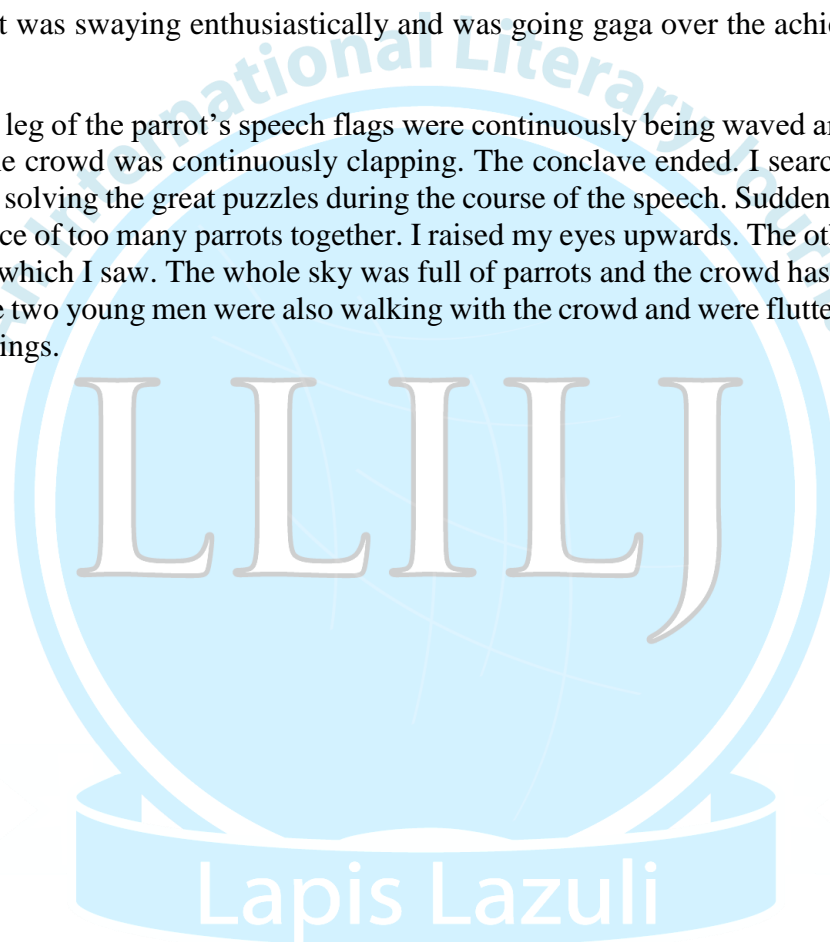
“All speeches are confounded and lost in the turrets and minarets of the Red Fort.”

Reaching to this point they both felt shy. Perhaps something is missing or is being lost. Both dropped their eyes. It becomes apparent that acceptance was difficult and they are failing miserably to get appropriate words.

The moment of parrot’s silence, during which they were even unable to complete one proper breath, came to an end.

The parrot was swaying enthusiastically and was going gaga over the achievements of the country.

In the last leg of the parrot’s speech flags were continuously being waved and slogans were raised. The crowd was continuously clapping. The conclave ended. I searched for the two who were solving the great puzzles during the course of the speech. Suddenly I was startled by the voice of too many parrots together. I raised my eyes upwards. The others might have also seen which I saw. The whole sky was full of parrots and the crowd has moved from its place. The two young men were also walking with the crowd and were fluttering their hands like the wings.



**BIO-NOTE**

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