

How I Became a Writer?

When I was born, English was not my first language, Kashmiri was. English was the language of my motherland India's occupiers, the British, who ruled India for 200 years; so, it became the language of the education imparted in many schools and colleges in India.

The story of my love affair with English is more than straightforward. Let me begin:

I was born a very sensitive, shy, and introspective boy. As if they were not a liability enough to have as a young boy, I was sent by my parents to stay with my uncle and aunt for six years, from the age of 12 through 18, 400 miles away in Kashmir. My familial shield was replaced by a foreign one, magnifying my vulnerabilities. The loss of my natural environment of my parental and sibling's love for me had a lasting effect on my outlook on my life at that time. This period of six years, till I left for an engineering college far away, became the most difficult period of my life. In fact, I have called it my heartbreak number 1, out of a total of six, in my autobiography, *Inclinations and Reality*.

I had to develop a strategy to negotiate my survival. Out of my introspection came the idea that if I developed a communication skill, I could manage my ordeal. By my being able to communicate with my uncle's family and the much larger Kaul clan, which existed in Kashmir, I thought I would be able to shield my vulnerabilities. And I hit it very well, as I became among the most popular boys in the clan. My uncles, aunts, and cousins became very fond of me. Relatives much older to me would confide their problems in me, as they thought I was very intelligent, and more valuable than that to them, I had a remarkable patience to listen to their tales of woe. This was also an entry for me to understand human nature, which became my life long quest.

Beyond managing my environment, I still felt a need to communicate deeply with someone. But my inherent shyness was still a block. One day I wrote a letter to one of my uncles living in another town of Kashmir, a communication that could have been better conducted on a phone. But as phones had yet not come to Kashmir for non-governmental use, I had no choice but to write a letter. A few weeks later when my uncle visited me, he gushed on my writing abilities. I did not

know whether to take it as my inherent talent or a one-time success. But another letter to a cousin created a similar response. So, I thought I may have a talent for writing. A little later I wrote a three-page short story, A Night to Remember, my first writing, and sent it to my father. He thought it was well written, though lacked a plot. By now I realized I had some writing skills.

So, that is how I became a writer, to satisfy my need to communicate with others and myself. But that skill would still be primitive, if it would not be pregnant with substance. My introspective nature provided that mass in the form of my philosophical inquiry into the nature of human life. My writing became the vehicle of my existence, the instrument of the exploration of my consciousness.

Many people have come to me throughout my life to learn how to write, especially the young people, as writing is among the most intense and uplifting self-involvement for them, after, perhaps, their self-love. Most of them had been attracted to my writing because of my style. Understanding their passion well, the first thing I would tell them was that they should forget the style in writing, instead they should concentrate on the substance of writing first. Style would evolve later.

So, writing for me is the exploration and shaping of my consciousness.

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