CHAPTER- 5

MENA ABDULLAH

Mena Abdullah is an Indian - Australian writer who has made a mark as an immigrant writer. Mena Abdullah comes from a Punjabi family. Her parental family migrated to Australia from Punjab in the nineteenth century. Her father arrived in Australia in the 1880s when he was only 15-year old. He spent his early days as a hawker and later on as a farmer. Mena was born in 1930. Her mother was a Hindu Brahmin, whereas her father was a Muslim. Thus Mena Abdullah was deeply influenced by both Hindu and Islamic cultures in her bring up. Her early days were spent in her father's farm, as a rather lonely child. These early experiences have a great bearing on the writings of Mena Abdullah.

Mena Abdullah's collection of short stories "The Time of the Peacock" was published as a single volume in Australia by the renowned publishing house, Angus and Robertson in 1965. It became extremely popular and was reprinted in 1973, 1974 and 1989. The volume was well received in literary circles, both in Britain and Australia. Favourable reviews appeared in the Time literary supplement in Britain and the western Australian Review in Australia. The Australians congratulated Abdullah on her sensitive depiction of a beautiful world in Australia and culturally rich canvas of India.
The title story "The Time of the Peacock" is truly representative of the two worlds of the writer- India and Australia. The story tells us about the childhood days of Nimmi when she, along with her sister Rashida and brother Lal, enjoyed the open fields of New England. It was a time when she was under the influence of her Hindu mother who used to tell her about the teachings of Lord Krishna and how Krishna could move even the hills.

The story is a study of child psychology. Nimmi, Rashida and Lal are all little children who play together and share their feelings with one another. They indulged in all sorts of childish activities and derived delight. In autumn they burned the great baskets of leaves and watched the fires. They used to hear stories of Lord Krishna, the flute-player from the mouth of their mother. They felt awe and delight to hear that Lord Krishna is strong and powerful enough to lift a mountain and move it from one place to another. Sometimes Nimmi used to see the mountain from her garden and run inside the house to think that the mountain was moving. In winter the children used to sit near the house hold fire and feel the warmth. They could hear the dingoes howling.

After winter, spring comes and the children enjoyed it very much. The sticks of the jasmine vine covered themselves with flowers and presented a beautiful sight. Nimmi, the narrator of the story has a special remembrance of one spring. They had a peacock in their garden. Nimmi could easily remember that Lascar brought the peacock to their farm in a bag and gave it to their mother. The peacock had come to
as found in India, it had white feathers. Rashida contradicted that the fan of the peacock is generally green and blue and gold and has a tail like a fan. But that Peacock hadn't these characteristics and so Rashida claimed that this one was not a peacock at all. But the mother corrected her that it was a white peacock. Thus this peacock became a centre of attraction for the children. They used to watch it to open its tail but the father claimed that the peacock would never open its tail in Australia; Uncle Seyed claimed that the peacock would never open its tail without a hen-bird near. Caring little for all these conflicting claims the children watched the peacock for days until they had grown tired of watching and it had grown sleek and shiny and had found its place in the garden. The children wanted to see this splendid scene when the peacock opens its tail and dance with inner joy. Nimmi used to ask the peacock:

"Won't you ever open your tail? I asked him again. "Not now that it's spring?" But he wouldn't even try, not even try to look interested, so I went away from him and looked for someone to talk to."¹

Nimmi's mother used to put out some milk in the garden during spring in order to feed the snakes. It was her belief that the snakes would not harm her children if she continued to feed them with milk. Her belief is similar to that of Ganga Ram in the story "The Mark of Vishnu" by Khushwant Singh. The mother of the narrator was a Hindu and thus she had this traditional belief of a devout Hindu. But during one spring the father shared a secret with Nimmi. The little girl could not
"Something we know but do not tell, or share with one person only in the world."\(^2\)

The father told her that there were no snake in their garden but if her mother continued to put milk in the open, the snakes might come and harm the children. So the father used to drink the milk of the bowl every night and the mother thought that the milk was actually drunk by some snakes. In this way, the father used to protect his children without hurting the Hindu belief of his wife. He shared this secret with Nimmi. This secret instilled Nimmi with the feeling of being a grown-up person. She used to walk and play along with others with the inner joy and pride of becoming a grown up person.

Another memorable experience which Nimmi had during that spring was related to the birth of a baby in the house. Her mother was expecting a baby. Lal insisted that it must be a boy so that he could have a brother to play with. But Nimmi insisted that it must be a girl and thus she would have a sister. The mother claimed that the baby would come in the house at night. Nimmi was waiting for that night quite impatiently and that important moment came at last.

"That night I heard a strange noise, a harsh cry. "Shah-Jehan" I said. I jumped out of bed and ran to the window. I stood on a chair and looked out to the garden.

It was moonlight, the moon so big and low that I thought I could lean out and touch it, and there-looking sad, and white as frost in the moonlight-stood Shah-Jehan.
"Shah-Jehan, little brother," I said to him, "you must not feel about your feet. Think of your tail, pretty one, your beautiful tail."

And then, as I was speaking, he lifted his head and slowly, slowly opened his tail-like a fan, like a fan of lace that was as if you had come from the moon."³

Next morning Nimmi came to know that her mother had given birth to a female baby. Thus she would have another sister to play with. She narrated her experience of the night with others that she had at last seen Shah Jahan, (the peacock) opening his tail and dancing in the moonlight. But others are not ready to accept it and thought it to be her dream. Nimmi did not bother for others. She had seen the peacock dancing and that was all. She thought that the peacock danced and spread its tail only on a special occasion like the birth of child in a house. Thus Nimmi thought herself to be a grown up with a secret shared by her father and the sight of the peacock spreading its tail and dancing with delight in the moonlight.

The story "Because of The Rusillia" describes the mixed experience of the narrator along with her brother and sister of a single day. In the story 'Rusilla' is the name of the small bird- since that bird was caught by Rashida, the narrator’s elder sister, their father named it as Rusilla. The little bird was the companion of the children. They loved and liked it very much. They put it in a chicken coop in the garden. The children felt much delight in feeding the bird with whatever they got in the garden. Shah-Jehan, the white peacock was also their companion.
The garden was the cage for the Rusilla. It was also a cage for Lal, the little brother of the narrator. Lal was the only son of his parent. So his parents were afraid and worried too much for Lal; they kept him in the garden. Rashida and Nimmi, the narrator could run mad by the creek, bare foot and screaming voices, but Lal could not go out without a grown-up. He had to live in the garden with the baby, Jamila, who was only six months old and who spent all her day sucking her fist and watching the rose-leaves move on the sky or in sleeping. She was not much good for a boy to play with. To Lal Rusilla was a bird, a friend from heaven. The children lost their interest in the bird but Lal loved it and watched it for hours. But one fine morning the children woke up to find that the Rusilla, the bird was gone. The door of the cage was open and the bird had disappeared. It was a great loss to the little child, Lal. He started crying for his bird. The father and the mother tried to console and pacify him. But it was no good. The father went round the paddocks with a net trying to find Rusilla. But the bird from heaven had gone and it seemed that there was no other like it in the world. At night Lal could not sleep because of his constant crying. Then the mother tried to console him:

“My son, no tears. Allah makes birds to fly. No tears. It is cruel; it is cruel to stay in a cage when you have wings and the heart to fly. No tears. You cannot hold a bird. You cannot hold things, anything, my son.”

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on going to town.

Next morning the children had a new experience. They had never
gone to town earlier. So they were curious to know about town and
its strange ways, Uncle Seyed came the next day with the wagon and
the children boarded in it quite cheerfully. The journey to the town
was not a long one but it was made interesting by the childish talk of
the children with uncle Seyed. At last they reached the destination.
Seyed stopped the wagon in the grass at the side of the road and
lifted the children down. He instructed them to wait for him in
shade as he would come back in a few minutes. After some time three
white children- a big boy, middle sized girl and a little boy were seen
coming towards them. The white children were amused to see the
strange dress of the narrator who did not find anything queer about her
dress. The white children understood that they belonged to India and
passed some insulting remark on them: “Nigger, nigger, pull the
trigger.” The innocent children could not understand their racial
comment. They thought that they were playing a game. Lal even ran
towards them to play. But the big white boy caught Lal around the
waist and gave him a throw that sent him backwards to the ground.
Rashida and Nimmi were shocked and surprised. They could not see
their only brother Lal beaten by someone. They rushed with a great
anger to face this challenge. Calling them “Sur Ka bucha” they attached
thumping and kicking and scratching while Lal sitting amazed on the ground. Just then Seyed came and shouted to stop fighting. At the sound of his voice and the sight of his turban, the fighting stopped and the strangers ran away. He picked Lal up and dusted him. Rashida commanded Seyed to take them home as they had a shocking experience of this town. But Seyed had some business at bank and he could not take them back home right now. He thought to put the children at a safe place and then do his work in town. So he took the children to a cottage on the other side of town where a white lady lived. He told them to stay with her and gave her no trouble.

The kind lady took the children into the house and like a very wise woman went on with her work and left them alone. The children walked round slowly and looked at everything with much curiosity. There was a piano in the house. Rashida struck a key of the piano a clear and loud note came out. Playing with the piano was a happy and soothing experience for the children and they soon forgot about their fighting and quarrelling with the white children. There was also a cat in the house. Lal began talking to the black cat that was sleeping under the table. He talked happily for a long time, but the cat woke up and walked into another room. Lal also went after him. Suddenly there came a whistling noise and a shout from Lal. Both Rashida and Nimmi ran after him. He was in the kitchen standing in front of the stove. On it was a kettle that was singing- He pointed to it. Lal was overjoyed to
The lady prepared some tea and then they all sat down to tea and scones and chattered like relations. After finishing their tea, the children went out to the wagon. They stood for a moment in the garden to say good-bye to the lady. The kind lady gave a rose each to Rashida and Nimmi, and the kettle to the little Lal. Lal took this gift with much happiness and it was like the regaining of his Rusilla.

The collection "The time of the peacock" brings out the natural activities of children and their fondness for birds and animals. "Kumari" is one such story which deals with the life of a fox cub in the farm of the narrator. After their return from the town, the children remained silent. The word 'nigger' haunted the mind of the narrator, Nimmi who thought herself dark girl in a white man's country, a Punjabi Muslim in a Christian land. Rashida, the elder sister of Nimmi also looked strange. She used to run from the kitchen where she should have been helping her mother in household works. She did not even want to play with her sister and brother. It seemed that Rashida had some secret and she did not want to share it with her sister. This made Nimmi angry. Rashida told Nimmi that she was too little to be trusted with any secret. But Nimmi was bent upon finding out her secret.

Next day Nimmi watched the activity of Rashida very closely. Rashida was doing something in the kitchen along with her mother but all of a sudden she disappeared. Nimmi started her search for Rashida
and this time she gets success. Rashida was on the other side of the lattice, on the far side of the vegetable yard? She was carrying a tin, very carefully, but sometimes water dripped from it. She took it into the old tool shed. It was a little puppy in the tin box and the children wanted to touch it and play with it. But Rashida did not allow them to do so because the puppy was sick. The mother of the puppy was dead in the trap. So Rashida brought it home to look after it. Its tail was injured in the trap, so it was bandaged by Rashida. Now the little secret of Rashida is known to all the children. Others insisted on taking it to the father because he would cure the injury in the tail of the puppy. Rashida was crying to think that her father would rebuke her because she had nursed the puppy without telling him. But ultimately it was decided to take the help of the father in this regard. The father examined the puppy carefully and told the children that it was a fox and it was a female. So the father named it ‘Kumari’. The father instructed the children:

‘Kumari will get well if you feed her with raw meat, if you give her water to drink, if you don't touch her food and don't touch her much. She's not used to the smell of wild little humans.’

Thus Kumari became a new member of their farm house. She wore a red collar like Yasmin the goat’s, but without bells on it. She was fed on raw meat and kept from the chickens. She grew to be a handsome fox. But the children treated her as a dog and played with her. She was the beloved of Rashida and they played the ball game together. At night Kumari used to sleep in the shed. But now Kumari
had grown up and her habits had also changed. At night Kumari began to whimper, to howl, to scratch at the shed door, to make a great banging noise as she flung herself at it. There was no playing now by day only the whining; the rushing to the net fence and looking beyond it. She was sick again. There was no playing now by day, only the whining, the rushing to the net fence and looking beyond it. She was sick again. There was nothing to be done but watch, and Kumari continued to yelp and whine throughout the night. The mother told Rashida to let Kumari go as she was a grown up animal now. The mother lovingly told Rashida:

“It is not her family, “Said Ama. “And she is grown now, what use is family to her? When you are grown it will be time to go from me, from all of us. It will be time to have family of your own. It is time for Kumari, Now.”

But Rashida insisted on keeping the fox with her. She would not let her go. But one night barking and whining of Kumari was so persistent that Rashida went to the shed door with a lantern, freed the fox. Soon Kumari disappeared beyond the fence. Rashida was crying over the loss of her dear thing and prayed to Allah for Kumari’s safety. All the Children were very sad as one member of their farm had gone.

One morning, at breakfast, the children heard a squawking of fowls and the father ran outside to see. The children also ran behind him. They at once recognized their fox ‘Kumari ‘with red collar. But their Kumari was lying dead. The other foxes did not accept Kumari in
their herd as she smelt of humans. When Kumari turned back to go to her house, the other foxes attacked and killed her. Thus Kumari could not get her proper place in the world and died at the end. The children wept over her death and buried her very solemnly with the tennis ball beside her. Thus the writer seems to suggest that the excessive human love for a wild animal like a fox makes it unacceptable in its own flock. A wild animal can’t become a pet and it should be left to lead its life freely along with its own members.

The story “Mibani” describes the birthday of the narrator and the gifts she gets on that occasion. As we know, the mother of the writer Mena Abdullah is a Brahmin Hindu whereas her father is a Muslim from Punjab. The cultural conflict between the Hinduism and the Islam is also discussed in this story with the arrival of the narrator’s grandmother at Australia.

It was the occasion of the narrator’s birthday and the entire family went on the picnic on the bank of the river Gwydir. It was the special occasion for the narrator, Nimmi and she enjoyed much on this picnic. Her father showed her many things on the bank. She was delighted to see the fish moving across the shallows. She also saw the high hills at some distance, almost touching the clouds in the sky. The father promised her to give her a present. He pointed to the clouds over the hill and promised to bring rain on her birthday. Nimmi wanted something concrete as a gift. The mother also promised to give her a present. She told Nimmi that her grandmother was coming all the way
from India to bless her on her birthday. The children had heard much about their grandmother who was a Brahmin. But they had not seen her yet. Their reaction was quite a mixed one at this news. Here the children did not want a Hindu grandmother in their house because she was strictly vegetarian whereas they were Muslims and ate meat every day. But soon the children forgot this cultural disparity and became ready to welcome their grandmother who was coming from India by ship. The mother of Nimmi grew nostalgic to think about India and her beauty.

After celebration, the night came and the children went to their bed. At night rain came as promised by the father. The thundering sound of the cloud frightened the narrator. The rain seemed like a quail song and hearing this song the children fell asleep. At night the grandmother also came as promised by the mother. But the little Lal caught cold and he fell sick.

The morning came with curiosity for Rashida and Nimmi. They came to know that the grandmother had come. Since they had not seen her earlier, they imagined strangely about their grandmother. They had a stern and serious figure of their grandmother in their mind. It was she who had objected much to the marriage of the mother with the father. The mother had told them about her marriage. It was a love marriage between the mother and the father. The father used to visit the mother’s house in Punjab and both of them fell in love with each other. It was a very tough decision for the mother because she had to marry
with a man who was a Muslim and he had to go to Australia. Thus after her marriage she had to leave India. The grandmother shouted much at the mother and cursed that god would punish her for marrying a Muslim. And God did punish her as her first born boy died in Australia. Thus the children had different opinions about their grandmother:

"In the garden, Rashida and I talked about her and wondered if she were very old. "She is over sixty," said Rashida. "She is terribly, terribly old."

Suddenly they heard a sweet voice in Hindi: "My Australian granddaughters."  

For the first time in their life, the narrator and her sister saw their grandmother. It was a nice experience for them.

It was not only the voice that was beautiful. The gold threads of her sari glittered in the sunlight that shone through the window and her face not old the way we meant old, though her hair was grey at the sides, like white wings. On her forehead was the round blue mark of the Brahmins and her eyes - big and kind and dark like Ama’s looked at us. She was very small. Her long gold ear-rings and her heavy bangles looked like chains, even though they were pretty. She was calling out names. "Rashida, Nimmi".

The grandmother had brought presents for each of them from India – Tiny gold bangles, gold ear-rings etc. The children liked the food of the grandmother very much. The dal she cooked was wonderful, full of spices and strong tastes. She made curries from all sort of vegetables. She was an expert cook.
of the little Lal. Lal lay on the bed most of the time and he did not want to speak. The doctor came from town to see him. The grandfather sat near him like a nurse. Due to constant care of the grandmother, the condition of Lal improved. Here the narrator coined a word for her ‘Nani’. This word is “Mirbani” which denotes all the good qualities of her grandmother. The stay of the grandmother with the narrator in Australia provided her to understand the Hindu Culture.

In fact, there is no difference between the Hindu and the Islamic cultures. What matters most is the love and compassion. The grandmother is almost the embodiment of these virtues and that is why, the narrator remembered her grandmother much after her departure from Australia.

The collection of short stories “The Time of the Peacock” is a strong fascinating world in which thieves and decoits are also presented as great and glorious. The story “the Outlaws” brings out this fact regarding the life of an outlaw. The children love to listen to stories from the mouth of their elders. The stories of the narrator’s mother used to be gentle and strange. She narrated stories of the time when magic people walked through the Hindustan, and everything was right and good. The father’s stories used to be true and real. He used to narrate about his migration from India to Australia. But the stories of the uncle Seyed were different. They were always gentle, but
not real. His stories appealed to the imaginative mind of the children much.

The story “High Maharaja” deals with another childish fancy. It describes the wonderful experience of kite flying by children. A little kite, flying and fluttering in the sky along with wind, appeals to a child much. That kite is of little price in the market. But the flying kite is of course, priceless for a child who is flying it at the moment. When the kite’s string is snapped and the kite is lost, it is a great loss to the little child. Other costly gift can’t compensate the loss of that kite to the child.

During Kite-flying season in Australia after summer, the narrator Nimmi, her elder sister Rashida and her younger brother Lal were busy with kite flying. Nimmi’s kite, like Lal’s was home-made. Its face was newspaper-brown paper but when it was swaying in the sky it looked grey and beautiful. But it was its tail which was really beautiful. It was red and green cloth that their mother had dyed especially to be beautiful. Rashida’s kite, on the other hand was a singing kite. It had come from India. It was her birthday present from an old friend of her father. It had been bright green when she had first flown it, but it had many coloured faces since then. But the sticks and the pierced bamboo read that was the Kite’s voice were always the same. The coloured paper to make its faces came from Song Ling, a Chinaman who had a store in town. Sometime his goods were packed in coloured paper and he always saved it for the narrator and her sister. A long time ago, in China he had flown kites,
Kite flying is a good pastime in India. The father used to tell the children stories of the kite seasons there and of the Basant Panchami, the spring festival, when all India flew kites and there were competitions to see who flew them best. The mother also told the children stories about brave young rajahs using kite as messengers of love. Remembering all these things, the children Rashida, Nimmi and Lal used to fly their kites in the open and enjoyed much. But whenever they flew their kites, a big eagle used to come and hover round the sky for sometimes and again it went towards the hill. The little Lal called the eagle, the Maharajah. Without his permission no one could fly the kites in the sky. According to Lal, “He is the king of the sky.” Thus the children looked up towards the eagle with much respect. Whenever they flew their kite, the high Maharajah was sure to come in the sky and hover round the sky for once and twice and again flew back to the hill. In their imagination, the children also wanted to become like the eagle and fly high in the sky:

“I want to fly”, said Rashida and she jumped up and down with her kite as though she were flying already. “If I could fly I would go so far up, that no kite could catch me. I’d so high that you, Nimmi, and you, Lal, would look like ants- would look smaller than ants. I would fly up so high that I could see all the world, everything, the whole world spread out like a carpet.”
While imagining herself flying in the sky, Rashida flung out her arms, to show the narrator and Lal how wide the world was. The roller fell from her hand and her kite began to leap away. They could get the roller back but their singing kite had gone. The singing kite flew upwards and away from them like a bird that had been set free. It was a great loss to Rashida as the signing kite was a special gift for her from India.

At home the mother scolded Rashida for being impatient while the father consoled her and promised to get another singing kite for her. But Rashida wanted the original one. The children searched for the singing kite desperately which was lost at the side of the hill from where the eagle used to fly. During their search they met their neighbor, Mr. Angus. They asked him about their kite, but he did not know about it. Instead he saw the eagle flying in the sky. He called it 'savage-looking brute.' This hurt the feeling of the narrator who at once retorted "It's the High Maharajah".10

But Mr. Angus said that it was an evil creature and it used to kill the flies and harm lambs. He said that "I'll shoot him if he comes near my place."11 The children were shocked and said that he could not shoot him as he was the king of the sky.

The next day Mr. Angus came to the narrator's place. He gave Rashida a long thin parcel which contained some Australian kites. There were three kites in it - one pink, one green, one orange. Father and Mr. Angus put the sticks together and fitted the faces over them.
They were big kites, as tall as Lal, and the orange one was for Rashida. But this Australian kite can’t sing like the lost one. The children ran down to the paddock to fly them. Just then they saw their Maharajah flying low over the bush near the hill. The curious mind of the children wanted to know the reality because the Maharajah (the eagle) generally flew very high in the sky. The Maharajah has not risen for a long time. So it increased the curiosity of the children even more. The children went towards the bush. The track was rocky and the trees grew low to the ground. The children went very near a big rock near the bush. Suddenly there was a noise from the other side of rock. There was a movement of branches and a sound like a rushing wind. The children went towards the bush. The track was rocky and the trees grew low to the ground. The children went very near a big rock near the bush. Suddenly there was a noise from the other side of rock. There was a movement of branches and a sound like a rushing wind. The children looked up and saw their Maharajah from such a little distance. The sight of the Maharaja generated the feeling of awe and fear among the children. The narrator describes: ‘We clung to each other, hiding our eyes, terrified. But we could not hide out ears. The beating of those mighty wings became the beating of our own hearts.’

When the children opened their eyes, the Maharajah had gone high in the blue sky. Rashida went round to the other side of the rock and shouted with delight because she had found out her singing kite there. Its tail was caught in the bush and the sticks broken.
singer, the kite’s own self - was safe. To Rashida, this torn kite was better than the new one given to her by Mr. Angus. Ultimately their Maharajah helped them to get their kite back. Rashida paid her thankfulness to the eagle by saying “The High Maharajah of the sky has given me my song, and I will thank him.”

We all know Mena Abdullah, the writer is the daughter of a Hindu mother and a Muslim father who settled in Australia later on. Thus the cultural conflict arising out of the love marriage is well known to the writer. The present story *The Child That Wins* deals with the conflict that arises due to the marriage between two different communities.

The narrator was standing near her gate when her eyes fell on Hussain, her cousin who was coming towards her farm house. Hussain was born and grew up in Australia. He took up the modern education and lived in a city to do the job of an accountant. He used to come to the narrator’s house quite frequently. He used to bring presents for the children. Thus his arrival there was a matter of great joy for the narrator. But this time Hussain looked quite different. He looked quite sad and serious. His jovial nature was not to be found anywhere. He greeted the father and the mother of the narrator in a traditional Muslim style much to the amazement of others as he used to shake hands with everyone in an English style. At last, the narrator’s father asked Hussain if there was anything wrong. Hussain now explained
on the matter of marriage. Hussain had studied in the town where he met a Christian girl, Anne. Both of them studied together and loved each other. After completing her education, Anne became a School teacher. Now they wanted to marry with each other in spite of their cultural differences. But Hussain’s father calls her a Christian, an eater of pig. He says that his father was against this marriage. Hussain explains the objection of his father: “My father does not approve. Calls her Christian, an eater of pig. He says she is white and I am black, our children will be yellow and brown and not belong anywhere. Her people will despise us and we will have no place. He says her ways are not our ways, that I am a traitor to Allah and to India. He wants me to marry some simpering silly who cry when I am angry, who’ll cook me nothing but rice and know nothing that I know.”

Hussain’s father advocated for the arranged marriage with a Muslims girl who was well acquainted with their customs and culture. But Hussain did not find anything wrong in his marriage with the Christian girl. He found a great difference between him and his father. His father was born and grew up in India. But Hussain could not become an Indian. He was born and grew up in Australia imbibing the new traits of Australia. He got the modern education which did not discriminate between two individuals. Moreover, Anne wanted this marriage. She loved Hussain. Both of them hoped to lead a happy conjugal life. They did not pay any attention to their cultural and
religious differences. But the traditional mind of Hussain’s father could not approve of this marriage. He severed all his connection with his son Hussain.

Hussain married with Anne inspite of the serious objection raised by his father. He lived with his wife in a small flat in the city because the doors of his father’s house were closed to him. He worked hard to earn money and raise his social status. He was happy with his wife and he never repented upon his decision. His first baby was born. Hussain came to the narrator’s farm house to celebrate the occasion. It was a moment of celebration and happiness for everyone. But Hussain’s father was not informed about it as he did not like to hear anything about his son Hussain.

One evening when Hussain was coming back to his flat he was surprised to hear the voice of his father. His father was speaking loudly to his wife Anne. He ran fast to reach his flat. He was surprised to see his father in a totally changed mood. He was holding his newly born baby in his arms and fondling him. He gave two golden bangles to his grandson as a gift. Thus this newly born child brings reconciliation between Hussain and his father. The child ultimately wins and removes the differences between Hussain and his father.

The parent of Mena Abdullah belonged to India, so the writer thinks and remembers India almost nostalgically. Like Mena Abdullah, the narrator of the story Nimmi also grows nostalgic about India. She always thinks that India is always better than Australia where she lives.
certain compulsion, otherwise they should have been living in the
glorious land of India.

In the present story “The Dragon of Kashmir” the narrator
expresses her love for everything India. Once upon a time Nimmi went
out to spend her holiday to the North coast near Nambucca along with
her parent. It was the summer but the grass was green and gentle there.
They stayed with the Shahs. They were nice people. Like Nimmi’s
parent, they had also migrated from India. Nimmi liked in particular
Grandmother Shah. She was old and gentle. She had come to Australia
from Kashmir. She had come a long time ago, when she was young and
her husband was also young. But now her husband was dead and her
children were grown up. Her grand children had adopted the
Australian ways and manners and they had no time to listen to her.
Thus Grandmother Shah led a lonely life in the house. But Nimmi
loved to talk to her and share her old memories of India. She asked her
questions and pestered her to tell of the old days and the old ways, to
tell her stories of Grandfather Shah and the days when he trained
camel drivers for the long rides through Australia, stories of
Kashmir and the jewels that the Indian Maharani wore. The narrator
explains the reaction of grandmother Shah:

“She scolded me and called me a Bengali, said that
I chattered like monkeys, that I was wearing her out, that
I should play with the other children and I should be
quiet - the way Kashmiri children were quiet - and should
never ask questions.”15
But the old lady always answered the narrator because she also liked her company. Whenever she started narrating something, she was lost in her past days. Nimmi always addressed her as grandmother although she was not related to her family at all, except by friendliness. Once the old lady let Nimmi look through the old cardboard boxes that held her memories – ribbons and letters, photographs and brooches. It was a warm day and Grandmother Shah sat in her chair in the shade of the tamarind tree and crocheted. Nimmi sat on the grass near her and went through one of the boxes. She saw the envelopes with their faded stamps and the letters covered with writing in Hindi. It was then, under a heap of letters, that Nimmi found the fan. It was old. Some of the sticks were broken. But it was silk, and big. It was bright, but faded. The narrator opened it and fanned herself like an Indian lady or a Maharani. But it was full of dust that made her sneeze. She narrates:

“So, sneezing and laughing and chattering like a monkey, I jumped up and dropped it on Grandmother Shah’s lap, on her crochet work. She did scold me then. I had made her white work dirty.”

This old fan transported the Grandmother into her past memories. She recollected everything about the fan. On the faded silk of the fan was a figure of a dragon. The grandmother explained that it was the dragon. The grandmother explained that it was the dragon of Kashmir. The photograph on the fan was withered. This photograph was taken by the brother of Grandmother Shah who had come back
from Oxford after completing his education. That photograph was
taken when the grandmother was 14-year old. Afterwards she came to
Australia but in fact she never wanted to go away. She wanted to be
home. She wanted to be married, with children, a house with servants
and the people that she knew. But destiny wanted something else. The
man, with whom she was married, brought her to Australia. This old
fan made her past memory fresh and all that summer she carried this
fan. The grandmother used to look at the old photograph in which
she was standing along with her sister. She left Kashmir but her sister
remained there. On every photograph and other things of Kashmir,
there was the figure of dragon. This raised the curiosity of the narrator.
The grandmother replied, “Because they eat everthing. Because they
live forever.”17 Meanwhile the photograph seen by the Grandmother
Shah was blown away by the wind. It went up high in the sky as if
ready to go back to India. But Grandmother Shah told Nimmi that the
dragon would eat it up.

The short story *The Babu from Bengal* is truly multicultural in
color. As is obvious from the title, the central character in the
story is a Babu from Bengal, now settled in Australia. His description
by the author is interesting: “He is a Babu, a Hindu, can read and write,
a clerk, a half - educated man.”18 The Babu has a special relationship
with the narrator’s mother who is a Hindu woman married to a Muslim
in Australia. Very often, he nostalgically talks to her about the rich
festivals of India like Diwali and Holi.
The Babu was an educated man. He also came to Australia in search of a job. Now he had become a popular figure among farmers as he used to write up their books. He also wrote letters for the uneducated farmers. His fees were high, but he was known and necessary. He was such a courteous man that he always listened to others and hardly spoke. But he was very free and frank with grandmother Shah because both of them were Hindus from India.

The Babu was very clever man. When he came to Australia, he knew that the Muslims in that area were quite rich but all of them were illiterate. They could become his clients. There Muslims wrote letters of business, letters to governments, letters of money, and they asked the Babu to write these letters for them. Usually they asked him to write only two letters a year. Thus the earning of the Babu was very low. So he thought out a plan. He started a quarrel between Mahmoud Ali and Ishak Khan. One day Babu was completing the account book at Ishak Khan’s house. Ishak was boasting about the wonder of his farm, the lushness of the grass, the sleekness of the cows, the magnification of his tomatoes. Here Babu got an opportunity to sow the seed of quarrel in the mind of Ishak Khan.

“Is it true then,” said the Babu with gentle surprise, “Your farm is doing well?” “Of course my farm is doing well!” “I was wrongly informed then”, said the Babu. “Or Perhaps I misunderstood.” Who? Who? Growled Ishak Khan. “Who has wrongly informed you?” I was talking the other day to your neighbor Mahmoud Ali” “Mahmoud Ali what did the liar say?” “He only said that he had heard that your cows had the disease. He warned me against eating
Ishak Khan was an angry man. At once his anger rose high against Mahmoud Ali. Had Mahmoud Ali been there, he would have been killed by Ishak Khan because his pride was hurt. He roared with anger and his wife and sons came running. He hurled so many abuses against Mahmoud Ali. He was rather ready to go straight to Mahmoud Ali’s farm to settle score with him. But he was stopped by the Babu’s gentle voice. The Babu suggested him not to go to Mahmoud Ali who pretended to be a friend. It would be better to convey one’s feelings through a letter. Everyone liked this idea and the Babu got an opportunity to earn some money. The Babu wrote this letter. He delivered it to Mahmoud Ali and collected his fee from Ishak Khan. The letter was beautiful phrased so as to have effect and to give no reason for its tone and anger. It was a savage, unprovoked attack and after a suggestion from the Babu, Mahmoud Ali dictated a reply. The Babu collected his fee from Mahmoud Ali. Thus the Babu’s earnings increased out of this quarrel. The author writes:

Letter followed letter – letters written down by the Babu letters for which the Babu was paid, letters the Babu delivered. The insults grew bigger and the letters grew longer. The Babu’s fees became greater. His pockets were as heavy as his turban. At Ishak Khan’s, at Mahmoud Ali’s he bowed and nodded, whether from weight of turban or heaviness of pockets or the need to be polite, no one will ever know. All that the rest of us knew was that the quarrel was fierce and forever, that neither farm would hear a good word of the other, and that the Babu buzzed between the two of them like a blowfly.
The quarrel between Ishak Khan and Mahmoud Ali increased and the Babu flourished at the cost of his quarrel. But other Muslims suspected Babu behind this meaningless quarrel. Wali Husson actually told others that it was a year since he had paid penny to the Babu. Now his son had come after completing his education His son could write his account book and also his business letters. He suggested others to take help of his son and in this way they could get rid of the clever Babu. But the Muslims could not reject Babu as he had become a part and parcel of their existence. They had only understood the clever machinations of the Babu. But they liked the Babu and treated him like their friend. Prof. Suman Bala in her book writes about this story, “Mena Abdullah is thus able to juxtapose the two societies – Indian and Australian in her stories. But she does not take sides. She depicts human life and human condition that has a universal appeal.” The Babu is loved and liked by the Muslims only because of his human values.

Thus we see that Mena Abdullah presents a world of children in Australia. She is not bothered about the life in the big cities- Canberra, Sydney – in Australia. Her world is a peaceful world far from the madding crowds of the cities. In her world there are peacock, bird, tiger, kite, the blue sky and the hills. The entire collection “The Time of the Peacock” presents the varied experience of the children in this peaceful world of Australia. But like Bharati Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, Mena Abdullah also presents in her stories the problems faced by the expatriates in the alien land.
References


2. Ibid., p.6.

3. Ibid., p.7.


5. Ibid., p.24.

6. Ibid., p.25.

7. Ibid., p.35.

8. Ibid., p.35.

9. Ibid., p.54.

10. Ibid., p.55.

11. Ibid., p.55.

12. Ibid., p.57.

13. Ibid., p.58.


15. Ibid., pp.78-79.

16. Ibid., p.79.
17. Ibid. , p.83.

18. Ibid. , p.84.

19. Ibid. , p.86.

20. Ibid. , p.88.